HOW NOT TO TRAIN A DOCTOR Siddhartha Mukherjee

THE NEW REPUBLIC

STEVEN PINKER'S FALSE PROMISE Simon Blackburn

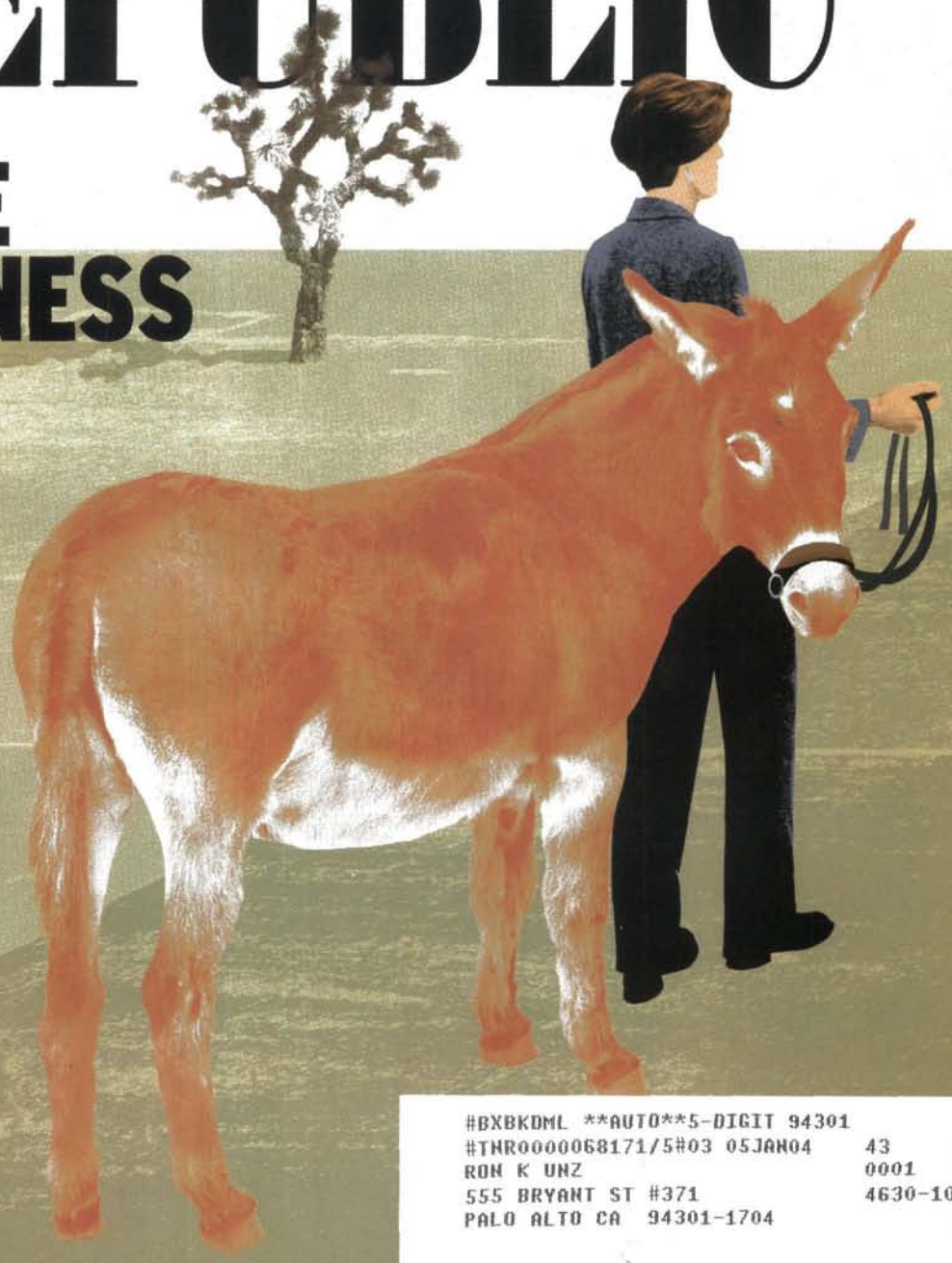
EMINEM'S RACIAL DODGE Justin Driver

OVEMBER 25, 2002

INTO THE WILDERNESS

NANCY PELOSI'S NEW DIRECTION FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Michael Crowley
The Editors



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
NOVEMBER 25, 2002
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CORRESPONDENCE

Doves cry

TO THE EDITORS:

Jonathan Chait's article is based on the questionable premise that ultimately we must wage war on Iraq to obtain peace—logic reminiscent of the party's slogan "War is Peace" in George Orwell's *1984* ("False Alarm," October 21). What follows is more classic doublespeak grounded in the philosophy that the ends justify the means. War becomes a humanitarian effort to liberate Iraq, and George W. Bush's threat to strike preemptively and unilaterally becomes a bid to strengthen international law by forcing the United Nations to enforce its resolutions.

In truth, Bush's thinly disguised blackmail weakens the United Nations by forcing it to choose between knuckling under to Saddam Hussein and to the corporate interests on the Security Council, and knuckling under to the corporate interests of America's executive branch. It also damages the legitimacy of American foreign policy and may ultimately require us to act preemptively, thereby turning the United States into a rogue state, undermining international law and exponentially increasing the number of terrorists who hate us. I do agree with Chait on one point: More "liberals" who believe in the principles upon which this country was founded need to speak up against this dangerous change in foreign policy.

NANCY FULLER
Encinitas, California

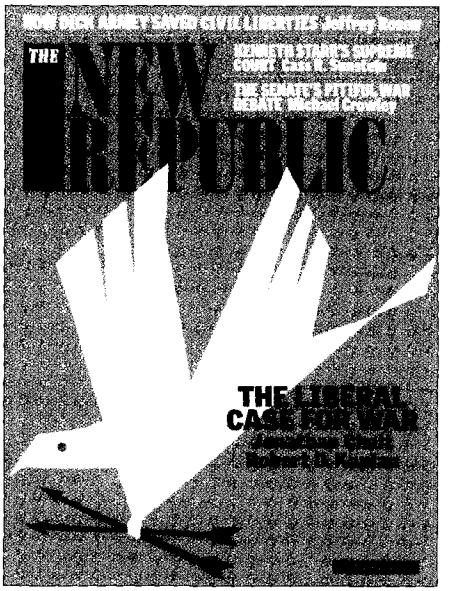
TO THE EDITORS:

I agree, Saddam has likely violated the cease-fire agreement, but get the Security Council to say so, and then we can move in. The cease-fire ending the war calls for the Security Council, not the United States, to enforce it. The U.N. charter calls for the Security Council, not individual countries, to enforce its resolutions. The U.S. Constitution says that agreements the United States enters into have the force of law. International law has regulated how and why countries can declare war for centuries. The Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war. The Bush administration's policies skirt these facts.

It is likely the United States will move in without explicit permission, but we will do so alone. The British solicitor general has already warned Tony Blair that he cannot use military force against Iraq without an explicit resolution from the Security Council.

Is a position asking for respect for the rule of law so hard to understand? Is the silence from our supposed allies not telling? They will support us only if we start approaching this the right way—not the way of an empire that believes it is above the law.

GARY DENTON
Pasedena, Texas



TO THE EDITORS:

Chait's argument that liberals secretly oppose war with Iraq because they hate Bush gets the situation backward: War with Iraq must be opposed because Bush has proved to be incompetent and incapable of international leadership. He is callous, sheltered, a draft evader, irrational, uninformed about the world, and his shifting logic strongly suggests that he has ulterior motives to push for war. The evidence that Bush is the wrong man for leadership is harder to ignore than the evidence that Saddam has nuclear weapons.

BURKE JOSSLIN
Seoul, South Korea

TO THE EDITORS:

I wanted to compliment Chait for his "liberal case for war." Finally, a liberal has broken free from the chains of partisan politics to blame his comrades for opposing the same use of force that President Clinton authorized in 1998. The mere fact that many Democrats who spoke out against war eventually voted in favor of the authorization of force proves that their initial opposition was not based on principle but rather was a knee-jerk reaction to a bill supported by a Republican administration.

SCOTT KAHN
Scarsdale, New York

Russian evolution

TO THE EDITORS:

In "Slave State," Robert D. Kaplan refers to Ronald Reagan's 1983 deployment of Pershing missiles in West Germany but then shows that he has no idea of its importance to the outcome of the cold war (October 21). What this deployment did was not convince Soviet leadership to look for new blood but nullify their existing war plans in Europe.

According to documents from the war ministries of Poland and other satellites that later fell into Western hands, the Soviet war plan for Europe called for a first strike with hundreds of nuclear weapons against a variety of NATO targets. The aim would have been to destroy NATO's command-and-control system and its ability to respond with nuclear weapons before the immensely superior Warsaw Pact forces rolled over the wreckage. But deployment of mobile Pershing and cruise missiles that could not be destroyed by a first strike would make a successful first strike impossible—hence the intense propaganda war against it. And, when the deployment became a reality, it forced the Soviets' new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to look for other ways to end the conflict. The Warsaw Pact satellites had been an economic drain on the Soviet Union. Their true importance lay in being a starting point for the conquest of Europe, but the deployment of Pershings had neutralized that role. Hence, when popular uprisings started in the satellites, Gorbachev just did not bother to put them down—as had been done in Hungary and Czechoslovakia—and simply let them slide away.

ARNO ARRAK
Dix Hills, New York

TO THE EDITORS:

Kaplan and his fellow neocons seem obsessed with creating a foreign policy record for Reagan that is at best a stretch and at worst wholly fanciful. Kaplan says that Reagan "helped convince a sclerotic Soviet Communist Party" to place Gorbachev in power by standing fast on the deployment of Pershing missiles in Germany. Even freshmen students of Soviet politics know: 1) Politburo succession was always a matter of patronage and connections, not Western or even American influence; and, 2) Gorbachev's mentor, Yuri Andropov, had groomed him to take power long before Pershing was deployed.

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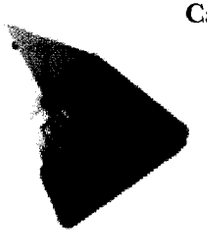

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Outer Limits

RIGHT-THINKING PEOPLE generally oppose term limits. They consider them a remnant of Perotist know-nothingism, a "throw the bums out" quick fix that would cause more problems than it would solve. And at the national level, right-thinking people—assisted by politicians' natural instinct for self-preservation—have largely won. Term limits, once a key plank of Newt Gingrich's Contract with America, are now off the national agenda. They have failed in the courts, which ruled that federal term limits require a constitutional amendment; in Congress, which couldn't muster the two-thirds vote necessary for such an amendment; and even among many erstwhile term-limits supporters themselves—who, after pledging not to run for reelection, went ahead and did so anyway.

But right-thinking people have a problem. They hate the fact that only about 10 percent of seats in the House of Representatives were competitive this election. Bipartisan gerrymandering following the 2000 reapportionment produced hundreds of safe Democratic seats, hundreds of safe Republican seats, and not much else. No wonder so few Americans voted, the right-thinkers sigh in disgust: In most House districts there was really only one candidate to vote for.

So what do they want to do about it? As far as I can tell, there are three options. The first is to take redistricting away from the pols. A few weeks ago, *The New York Times* wrote lovingly about the redistricting process in Iowa. In 1981, after a series of partisan lawsuits that wounded the Hawkeye State's goo-goo pride, Des Moines handed redistricting over to nonpartisan technocrats. The number crunchers are charged with creating compact, contiguous, equally populated districts—regardless of whose ox they gore. And, although state legislators must ultimately pass the plan, they are generally shamed into doing so. This year, the result was that Iowa had reasonably close general-election contests in four of its five House districts. Not bad when you consider that California, which boasts 53 districts, featured a close race in only one.

If every state followed Iowa's lead, American politics would be a lot more democratic, a lot fairer, and a lot more fun. But it would be no fun at all for incumbent politicians—most of whom would face tough races every time the United States held a census. And that's why the Iowa process, blissful as it would be, isn't a realistic answer to the right-thinkers' problem. It runs smack into the self-interest of the politicians who would have to make it happen. And it has no ready-made ideological constituency, no preexisting movement, left or right, which could serve as a countervailing force.

The second option is campaign finance reform. But McCain-Feingold, emasculated as it has been by a right-wing Federal Elections Commission, offers little hope of reducing the influence of money in elections, thus giving challengers a better chance. Public financing might have more of an impact, but Republicans hate it, and the public isn't very supportive either.

The third option, term limits, has a better shot. For one thing, current incumbents could be bought off with a grandfather clause—the term limits wouldn't go into effect for their district until they retired. For another, term limits *do* have a preexisting ideological base. For close to a decade now, most conservatives have supported them, at least rhetorically. When the issue came up for a vote in the House in 1995, 189 Republicans voted yes and only 40 voted no. And, because of this ideological support, 17 states have passed term limits for their own lawmakers. (State term limits, unlike federal ones, don't require a constitutional amendment.) If right-thinking liberals threw their weight behind the idea as well, it might have a chance.

Would term limits make congressional races more competitive? Absolutely. Compare races for Congress, which are not term-limited, with races for governor, which mostly are. Of the 435 members of the House whose seats were up this fall, 384 will serve next year. That's a turnover rate of 12 percent. Of the 34 senators whose seats were up, 24 or 25 (depending on the runoff in Louisiana) will serve next year. That's a turnover rate of around 30 percent. By contrast, of the 36 governors' mansions up for grabs this fall, only twelve will remain in the hands of their current occupants—a turnover rate of 66 percent. That's not because lots of incumbent governors lost: Of the 15 sitting governors who ran this year, only four were defeated. It's because, in 21 states, there was no incumbent governor on the ballot, and, in more than half of those, the reason was term limits. All in all, a whopping 20 governors' mansions switched from Democrat to Republican or vice versa, a party turnover rate more than ten times that in the House and Senate. As *National Journal* put it, "The biggest winner in the 2002 gubernatorial races is: change."

Of course, many traditional objections to term limits remain. Critics charge that, by ushering in a rash of inexperienced lawmakers, term limits will either produce legislative chaos or a Congress essentially run by a permanent staff. That, in turn, could weaken the legislative branch's authority vis-à-vis the executive—an authority already threatened by the war on terrorism and the Bush administration's aggressive assertion of presidential prerogative. Skeptics also point out that term limits don't necessarily eradicate career politicians—they just make those career politicians run for something else. In California, which has term limits for the state Senate, state Assembly, and many city councils, the result has been a game of musical chairs in which the same politicians simply switch offices.

But none of these problems threaten the democratic process as much as the epidemic of noncompetitive elections, a plague that alienates many Americans from their government. America's low voter turnout stems from a host of different factors, many not solvable by legislation. But the 2002 election clearly shows that competitive races bring more people to the polls. Voter turnout last week was 61 percent in both Minnesota and South Dakota, which featured close races for the Senate, House, and governor. But it was only 39 percent overall.

As things stand, the people who most bemoan this lack of participation have no credible response to it. One good liberal answer—campaign finance reform—has been tried and, for the time being at least, has not worked. Another—nonpartisan, technocratic redistricting—will probably never be tried because it lacks a political base. Which leaves term limits, a conservative-populist answer liberals have long scorned. Is some of that scorn justified? Sure. But, if right-thinking people really think preordained elections are a stain on our political system, they should embrace a flawed solution over none at all. Or else they should stop complaining and accept that the 2002 election is as good as American democracy is going to get.

PETER BEINART

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Getting the Message

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN CONYERS JR., who knows a liberal when he sees one, says applying that label to soon-to-be-elected House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi is a "mischaracterization." Pelosi's former House colleague Barbara Boxer, now the farthest-left member of the Senate, goes even further: "I have to laugh when people pigeonhole her as a liberal."

These claims say a lot more about the ideologies of Pelosi's colleagues than they do about her own. After all, the San Francisco Democrat routinely wins 100 percent ratings from groups such as the AFL-CIO, Americans for Democratic Action, and Planned Parenthood. She voted against the Gulf war in 1991 and against George W. Bush's use-of-force resolution last month. She has rejected fast-track trade promotion authority on the grounds that it lacked adequate environmental safeguards. And she denounced the 1996 welfare reform bill on the floor of the House as "mean-spirited, punitive, discriminatory, and unconscionable."

Pelosi, in other words, is a pretty good reflection of her Bay Area district. The problem is that Pelosi's district, which favored Al Gore over Bush by a 77 to 15 margin, isn't a good reflection of the rest of the country. And the recent history of leaders who hail from their party's geographical base has not been encouraging. Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey proved to be so out of step with the political mainstream when they took over the House in 1994 that they more or less assured Bill Clinton's reelection two years later. Pelosi has already shown similar tendencies toward the tone-deafness that ideological insularity breeds. For instance, as Michael Crowley reports (see "Follow the Leader," page 19), Pelosi opposed the Gulf war partly on the grounds that it could create an "ecological disaster of the first order" in the Persian Gulf. But the real problem isn't so much what Pelosi is capable of doing; it's what she is *incapable* of doing. In the most recent election cycle, the Democrats' decision to go to the mat for labor by stalling a homeland security bill wound up costing them at least one Senate seat—and, perhaps, two or three. Neither Dick Gephardt nor Tom Daschle, both of whom hail from swing states, saw this disaster coming. Is there any reason to believe Pelosi, who has never in her own races had to reflect on the inclinations of swing voters, wouldn't do even worse?

As minority leader, Pelosi will find herself constantly pulled to the left by her caucus, which overwhelmingly consists of liberal Democrats from safely gerrymandered districts. (Just look at the effect that caucus had on Gephardt, once a pro-life, conservative Democrat.) The consensus now materializing in the caucus is that the Democrats lost last week because they failed to excite their liberal base. But this analysis fundamentally misses the larger picture: The country has moved rightward, not leftward, since September 11, 2001. Which is why Democrats need a counterweight to this stultifying liberal orthodoxy if they are ever to pick up the 15-odd House seats that will return them to the majority.

Pelosi is poorly positioned to achieve this, too. Even if she does stake out sensible positions on the issues, her background will make it hard for her to frame them effectively. Take the Bush tax cut. It's entirely possible—we think likely—that a majority of voters would favor freezing yet-to-be-phased-in upper-income tax cuts in exchange for middle- and working-class relief in the short term and balanced budgets in the long term. But Pelosi, who opposed the 1997 balanced budget agreement because it cut spending on health care and who derives most of her support in the Democratic caucus from free-spending liberals, lacks the credibility to make that case. Coming from Pelosi, any attempt to freeze the tax cut will instantly be cast by the White House as a plot by tax-and-spend liberals to gouge the middle class.

Don't think the White House is capable of this? Just ask Max Cleland, a man who left Vietnam a triple amputee but lost his Senate seat when Republican strategists sowed doubts about his patriotism. Or Daschle, a moderate in both disposition and worldview, whom the White House has effectively labeled a partisan obstructionist. If Cleland and Daschle can be caricatured as McGovernite liberals, what are the chances Pelosi won't fare even worse?

Following Gingrich's ouster in 1998, then-Majority Whip Tom DeLay—perhaps the most polarizing Republican in Congress—rejected a House speakership that was his for the taking. Aware of the harm he might inflict on his party by becoming its public face, he instead installed his deputy, a mild-mannered Midwesterner by the name of Dennis Hastert, in his place. Much as it pains us to say it, Democrats should follow DeLay's example today: Keep Pelosi where she can be effective—as the *second*-ranking Democrat in the House. ■

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NOTEBOOK

PRIVATE LESSONS: Of all the triumphalist conservative spins that have emerged in the wake of the congressional elections, perhaps the most idiotic is the assertion that the vote constitutes a mandate for privatizing Social Security. "Victories by candidates who vigorously endorsed individual private retirement accounts shattered a tenet of American political folklore: that Social Security is the third rail for Republicans," rejoiced columnist Robert Novak. "GRANDMA DOESN'T SCARE ANYMORE," a *Wall Street Journal* editorial chimed in. The evidence offered for this proposition is that many Democratic candidates attacked their opponents for supporting privatization, and yet Republicans still won the senior-citizen vote by twelve points. This interpretation, of course, ignores the fact that most Republicans pulled off this coup precisely by running *away* from privatization. For instance, New Hampshire's John Sununu, held up by Novak as a successful champion of privatization, sent out a campaign mailer assuring voters, "Social Security is a sacred trust. John Sununu will fight any privatization scheme that puts your benefits at risk!" Or take Minnesota's Norm Coleman, another supposed privatization champion. His website promised, "Norm Coleman believes Social Security benefits should be protected and delivered. He wants to save Social Security, not privatize it." (In case you're wondering, this isn't the Cato Institute's party line.) In a Greenberg postelection poll, Republican voters were asked to rank twelve possible reasons for voting the way they did. "To protect Social Security" was cited by 23 percent of respondents, making it the fifth most frequent reason. "To get individual investment accounts in Social Security" finished last, chosen by just 8 percent. This is a mandate, all right. Just not for what Bob Novak thinks it is.

THE ULTIMATE SANCTION: Say what you will about religion in or out of politics, but a religious life is supposed to make a person humble. Piety should have a salutary influence on the ego. He who worships God cannot mistake himself for God: This should be obvious. But John Ashcroft has made it exceedingly unobvious. In the prosecution of John Muhammad and John Lee Malvo, the attorney general has been expressing little but a powerful desire to see them die. He seems to think that the decision as to who shall live and who shall die is his to make. "It is appropriate—it is imperative—that the ultimate sanction be available for those convicted of these crimes," he declared on November 7. "We believe the first prosecutions should occur in those jurisdictions that provide the best law, the best facts, and the best range of available penalties." By "the best range," Ashcroft means the death penalty. For this reason, the attorney general decided to allow state prosecutors in Virginia to get the case first. As *The New York Times* reported, "Justice Department officials believe that [a Virginia venue] offers the best chance of securing the death penalty against the two men." Needless to say, the attorney general's candor about his motives in bringing the case has given the public defenders of the suspects a big legal break. But Ashcroft's moral obtuseness troubles us more than his legal obtuseness. What he has expressed is not a principled preference for capital punishment. What he has expressed is bloodlust. Ashcroft operates with the sort of certainty that used to be associated with individuals with direct access to the godhead. That is most assuredly not the sort of certainty that the Founders had in mind for the American government. First, the snipers call themselves God because they kill. Now, the attorney general acts like God because he can kill. All of this is not good for God's reputation.

RETURN OF THE TRIFECTA FICTION: It was nice while it lasted. As near as we can tell, it had been about four months since President Bush or his underlings had told the infamous "trifecta" story, once the president's favorite political anecdote. According to the story, while on the campaign trail in 2000, then-candidate Bush told a Chicago audience that he would only deficit-spend in cases of recession, war, or national emergency. Bush's post–September 11 punch line (drumroll, please): "Never did I dream we'd have a trifecta." It's a great story, but, as we spent the summer pointing out, it's also a big fat lie. There is no public record of Bush saying anything of the kind on the campaign trail (in Chicago or elsewhere); no reporter who covered the campaign recalls ever hearing him say this; and the White House, despite repeated media requests, has never offered any evidence that he did. (There are, however, many examples of candidate Bush pledging not to touch the Social Security surplus under any circumstances. Oops.) After White House aides reportedly worried in July that the story was undermining the president's credibility, he abruptly stopped telling it. But, last Sunday on "Meet the Press," White House Chief of Staff Andy Card, perhaps giddy with his party's good fortune in the previous week's elections, disinterred the trifecta story. "[The president] said that if we were in a recession, if we were in a war—and we are in a war against terrorism—and if we had a national emergency, he would not be afraid to deficit spend," Card told Tim Russert. "We are deficit-spending because we've had that trifecta of challenges to this country." Actually, no. The nation faces deficits as far as the eye can see—and would be even if there had been no September 11 attacks or war on terrorism—because, on the campaign trail and in office, Bush told a series of spectacular lies about the cost of his tax cut and the probable performance of the economy. And even resuscitating the discredited trifecta tale won't change that.

MURDER, INC.: The feral murders inflicted on Kibbutz Metzer this week say a lot about the moral and political culture of the Palestinians. Five people were killed: a woman who was walking with her boyfriend in the moonlight, a kibbutz leader, and a mother and her two children, ages four and five, who were shot in their home. Before the bodies were cold and the blood of the innocent washed away, the Al Aqsa Mar-

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tyrs Brigade claimed credit for both the slayer and the slayings. Which is hardly surprising, since such murders are their vocation. Locating Al Aqsa on the Palestinian spectrum is easy: They are not Muslim zealots like the suicide bombers of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. They are just killers, with a wide range of means. But, politically, they are Fatah recruits—yes, the Fatah of Yasir Arafat himself. So, you see, they are moderates. And, as it turns out, while the murders were being committed, Fatah officials were in Cairo, ostensibly to convince senior Hamas figures to stop killing Israelis within the country's pre-1967 lines. The European Union gamely endorsed this initiative, which meant, as Fatah made clear, that settlers and their children in the West Bank and Gaza were fair game. But Fatah's Al Aqsa subsidiary hadn't gotten the message that the murder of some Israeli civilians is justified, and the murder of others is not. Kibbutz Metzer is within the 1967 lines, yet its residents were slaughtered nonetheless. And there is another irony to the agony of Kibbutz Metzer. It belongs to the far left of the kibbutz movement, Hashomer Hatzair, which used to worship Karl Marx, if truth be told. In elections, its members and inhabitants vote overwhelmingly for the extremely dovish Meretz Party. It had genuinely good relations with its Israeli Arab neighbors and rather decent relations with its Palestinian neighbors across the green line. Metzer still believed that its eager amity with the Palestinians could be a light to the two peoples. In the last few months, it had been arguing with the Israeli army over where a fence should be erected to enhance the safety of the kibbutz and to close gaps in Israel's protective line. For technical security reasons, the army wanted to place it a few hundred meters into the territories, but the kibbutz, siding with its Palestinian friends, wanted it erected on Metzer land. The army won but had not yet built the fence. Now, we suspect, the grieving kibbutzniks will not object. And yet another group of idealistic Jews will have been mugged by Middle Eastern reality.

IN WHAT ORDER?: "Iran's hard-line judiciary today sentenced an outspoken reform activist to death, 8 years in jail, 74 lashes and a 10-year ban from teaching, the Iranian Student News Agency reported today."—*The New York Times*, November 8

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: In Michael B. Oren's article "The Rescuer" (October 28), Cordell Hull should have been identified as Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of state, not his secretary of defense. The article also suggested that Abraham Isaac Kook, who died in 1935, was still chief rabbi of Palestine in 1940. Also, last week, we mistakenly identified the independent accounting arm of Congress, the General Accounting Office, as the "Government Accounting Office" ("Perverse," by Nathaniel Frank). We regret the errors. ■

INSIDE THE BELT | Bruce Reed

LANDSLIDE I Bush's coattails spread as Security Council votes 15-0 on Iraq. Exit polls on why France backed Bush: "We thought antiwar crowd went too far at the Wellstone funeral."

LANDSLIDE II Left wing says it's time to define clear differences between Democrats and Bush. Here's one: He's popular!

TREASURE PLANET Giddy K Street prepares long wish list for new Congress. Lobbyists to White House: "It won't do any good to cut taxes for the rich unless you also cut taxes for the businesses that make them rich."

LOW EXPECTATIONS Opponents revise view of Bush. Before midterm: "What a moron!" After: "What does that make us?"

WHISTLING DIXIE GOP sweeps Georgia by promising to bring back Confederate flag. State chair Ralph Reed: "Karl told us to use the war against them—he didn't say which one!"

DEMOLITION DERBY Virginia prosecutors win battle with Maryland to host sniper trial. Ashcroft's new bumper sticker: VIRGINIA IS FOR KILLERS.

CLOSING COSTS Special interests spent $1 billion on '02 campaign. Corporate America: "With rates so low, we couldn't resist buying both houses!"

HE'LL BE BACK Schwarzenegger locks up '06 GOP nod with C.A. after-school-program triumph. Reaganites' dream come true: a bad actor and a big draw!

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Can mercenaries protect Hamid Karzai?

Out of Service

By JONATHAN D. TEPPERMAN

ONE WARM DAY in Kandahar early this fall, a uniformed Afghan soldier stepped in front of the car carrying President Hamid Karzai—and opened fire. Karzai ducked, narrowly escaping the hail of bullets, and was instantly surrounded by heavily muscled, fair-skinned men who returned fire. Although the assailant was never conclusively identified, Karzai's rumpled plain-clothes guards quickly were. They turned out to be American Special Forces troops, part of the small garrison that has shadowed the Afghan president at his request since late July, and they have already thwarted several assassination attempts.

Unfortunately, the next time someone tries to kill Karzai—and there will be a next time—the faces around him will be different. Washington is about to replace Karzai's crack Pentagon bodyguards with hired guns; specifically, the employees of DynCorp, Inc., a Virginia-based "private military corporation" (PMC).

While PMCs like DynCorp may be popular in Republican Washington, which is now enthusiastically outsourcing many of America's military duties to the private sector, using them in Afghanistan could be a dangerous mistake. Private contractors seldom prove cheaper or more effective than uniformed soldiers. Worse, they are virtually impossible to control and have committed a litany of abuses in America's name. Using these unproven freelancers to guard Karzai thus will send precisely the wrong message to Washington's friends and enemies around the world and will increase the risks of a foreign policy disaster in Afghanistan.

The use of PMCs has grown dramatically over the last decade; there are now about 35 such firms in the United States alone. DynCorp, a 56-year-old corporation with 23,000 employees and an annual income of almost $2 billion, is one of the biggest. Its rivals include Virginia-based MPRI and Texas-based Kellogg Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, Dick Cheney's former employer.

The newfound popularity of such companies is easy to understand. After the end of the cold war, the United States slashed its active-duty military personnel from around two million to 1.4 million. This shrinkage has caused manpower shortages within the services and a glut of retired officers flooding the private sector. The contraction of the American military also coincided with the largest economic expansion in U.S. history, an era when many policymakers came to assume that private companies could perform public tasks better than government bureaucrats.

And sometimes they can. PMCs often perform a wide variety of noncombatant roles with a high level of professionalism. DynCorp maintains military aircraft, runs communications systems, and helps to manufacture the U.S. Army's anthrax vaccine, among other tasks. But, while PMCs may hate being thought of as mercenaries, they sometimes do end up sending men with guns to foreign countries under American auspices. Unfortunately for Karzai, in this area, PMCs' records have been disastrous.

The first problem with using PMCs as soldiers may ironically help to explain the idea's appeal. It is almost impossible to figure out what they or their client—in this case, the U.S. government—is up to.

PMC employees abroad work in a legal netherworld. As contract employees, they are not subject to the U.S. military's code of conduct. Nor are they subject to U.S. law, since it does not extend to most offenses committed abroad. And, while PMC employees are technically subject to the laws of the country in which they serve, those states usually have weak judicial systems. According to Peter W. Singer, a Brookings Institution expert on PMCs and author of the forthcoming book *Corporate Warriors*, "These companies operate in areas where the local legal system is either unable or unwilling to hold these guys accountable."

In practice, then, America's freelance warriors are free to misbehave—and to escape the consequences. When a number of DynCorp employees working in Bosnia were recently found to be running a sex-slavery ring, the Army's Criminal Investigation Division dropped its inquiry after determining the men fell outside of its jurisdiction. U.S. courts proved to be similarly impotent, and the fragile, corrupt Bosnian legal system did no better. Similarly, if Karzai's new bodyguards decide to flout the law in Afghanistan, a nation with ample opportunity for profiteering and corruption, there is very little that anyone—Karzai, the Pentagon, or U.S. courts—will be able to do about it.

Industry representatives reply that the invisible hand of the market guarantees accountability. Doug Brooks of the International Peace Operations Association, a PMC lobbying group, argues that no firm would deliberately misbehave because it would then risk losing the government contracts on which it depends. Yet DynCorp, which gets 95 percent of its business from the U.S. government (much of this from the State Department), has suffered no loss of income from the ongoing Bosnia scandal. In fact, PMCs have an economic incentive to cover up crimes rather than punish the troublemakers, since such revelations tend to be bad for business.

IN ADDITION TO their employees' impunity, companies like DynCorp create another, similar problem: They allow the executive branch to evade public scrutiny—and, at times, to flout it. Take Afghanistan. When Washington recently announced that the Special Forces were abandoning Karzai, it also declared that the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service would get

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the gig. State then delegated the assignment to DynCorp. But there the trail runs cold. Apart from giving a boilerplate explanation for why it was subcontracting the mission, no one in government or at DynCorp would tell me when the mission will start or finish, confirm exactly what roles DynCorp will play, or even reveal what the company will be paid.

Nor can they be compelled to. The company has no legal responsibility to discuss its business with the media or with Congress, and private contractors are not governed by congressionally mandated limits on troop commitments or rules of engagement. The government is just as immune, since it's not required to disclose the details of what are known as "proprietary contracts" with PMCs. The Defense Department doesn't even need to notify Congress of the existence of contracts that cost less than $50 million. As a result, PMC missions often fly beneath the radar, garnering almost no attention in the press or anywhere else. True, Democratic Representative Jan Schakowsky of Illinois tried last year to block the use of PMCs in the Andes, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee attempted to hold up funding for DynCorp's Karzai mission. But to no avail: State ignored the committee, and most other PMC engagements have escaped comment entirely.

The U.S. government has taken ample advantage of this lack of scrutiny, using contractors to circumvent legal restrictions in a number of conflicts. It hired PMCs to get around the U.N.-monitored arms embargo imposed on Croatia and Bosnia during the Yugoslav wars. DynCorp has been contracted to run anti-narcotics operations in Colombia, where it has deployed over 300 employees for coca eradication and armed search-and-rescue missions that have led to pitched battles with Colombian rebels. DynCorp's employees in the field are free to ignore congressional rules on protecting human rights in Colombia, which restrict the United States from aiding Colombian military units that have been linked to abuses.

In short, by hiring private military contractors such as DynCorp, the U.S. government has found an effective way to conduct foreign policy by proxy and in secret. These proxies cannot be monitored, are effectively immune from all criminal sanctions, and are dangerously hard to control since they answer to corporate bosses, not military brass.

PMCs ALSO FAIL to deliver on their central promise: better performance and lower costs. For one thing, people get paid better in the private sector. DynCorp pilots in Colombia earn more than $100,000 per year—far more than they'd get paid in the military. What's more, as Deborah Avant, a political scientist at George Washington University, explains, private companies can only perform a mission more cheaply when they are allowed to do things their own way. This means cutting corners, something that can't always be tolerated. "For privatization to be cheaper, you have to give the contractor flexibility," Avant says. "But, if you want control, if you care about how the mission is done, then it's going to be more expensive."

In fact, virtually every time the Pentagon has bet on PMCs, it has failed to save the money it expected. The Defense Science Board has predicted that the Pentagon would save $6 billion per year from outsourcing, but this figure later turned out to be 75 percent too high. Earlier this year, the General Accounting Office established that the use of military contractors to provide logistics in the Balkans ended up costing the United States hundreds of millions of dollars more than expected. To make matters worse, no single person in the Defense Department ever knew how many contractors were employed in the Balkans or what they all were doing.

And it's not just that DynCorp hasn't saved the government money; it has often proved to be incompetent, if not downright corrupt. First, there was DynCorp's Bosnia sex-slave ring. Over the last few years, about a dozen company employees in Bosnia allegedly bought and sold Eastern European prostitutes (one girl, "owned" by an American in his sixties, was only twelve years old), trading these slaves with friends and holding the girls' passports to prevent them from fleeing. Several DynCorp employees even videotaped a rape of one of the women. Once these crimes were brought to light, the company did fire a few of the guilty. But it also used apparently trumped-up charges, such as time-card tampering, to fire two employees who had brought their co-workers' crimes to light. The two employees both sued to get their jobs back, and, this summer, only weeks before DynCorp was awarded the Karzai mission, a British tribunal ruled that one of the employees' termination had violated the United Kingdom's whistle-blower statute.

Former DynCorp employees also allege that the company has tried to defraud the U.S. government on various occasions, providing cheaper, untrained workers and performing unnecessary repairs to pad the bills. According to one employee, over the last few years, "there has been a dramatic drop in experience and competence, replaced by ignorance, inexperience, and downright unsafe maintenance practices." Ben Johnston, one of the two whistle-blowers fired in Bosnia, described a co-worker who weighed over 400 pounds, stuck cheeseburgers in his pockets while at work, and regularly fell asleep on the job—in one case, while he was holding a torch, which wound up burning a hole in the side of an aircraft. A third DynCorp employee, Tom Greer, has complained to Congress that the company regularly misrepresents the qualifications of its employees: So-called aviation experts at U.S. bases in Mannheim, Germany, have turned out to be former cashiers, security guards, and cooks.

Yet another DynCorp scandal took place in Peru in April 2001, when a local air force jet shot down a private plane carrying American Baptist missionaries. Two of the passengers—35-year-old Veronica Bowers and her 7-month-old daughter, Charity—were killed. The Bowers had the misfortune to be misidentified as drug smugglers by U.S. contractors acting as spotters on the ground. These contractors were working with the Peruvian government but were on the payroll of the CIA. And, although they were technically employees of Aviation Development Corporation

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(ADC) of Montgomery, Alabama, the spotters were reportedly working under a subcontract with DynCorp (although neither the company nor the U.S. government will comment on such arrangements). ADC and DynCorp have never accepted responsibility for the shoot-down, nor has the U.S. government accused either firm of any wrongdoing.

There's little reason to believe DynCorp will be any more effective in Afghanistan. While PMCs do sometimes prove ruthlessly effective at security work, to do so they require complete freedom of movement. For example, in the recent civil war in Sierra Leone, a handful of South African mercenaries in two helicopter gunships managed to rout the rebels in a matter of weeks. That won't be possible in Afghanistan, however; though it's still a largely lawless place, many members of Karzai's government (especially Abdullah Abdullah, the powerful foreign minister) are highly resentful of any American presence and are guaranteed to watch the foreigners closely, waiting for them to slip up. Moreover, the 39-man protection team the company has assigned to safeguard Karzai will face serious problems with what's known as "interoperability." Although many of the new bodyguards may be retired Special Forces troops themselves, as civilians they'll find it next to impossible to get rapid military intelligence and communications support from their former colleagues, who distrust nonmilitary guards. In practical terms, this means DynCorp may not know about coming threats to its client, Karzai. Nor will it be able to call in instant military support, such as air strikes, to help fend off attacks, an option available to U.S. Special Forces guarding the Afghan president. The next time assassins come gunning for Karzai, DynCorp will have to face them alone.

GIVEN ALL THIS, why would Washington hire DynCorp to guard the life of Karzai, a man the United States desperately needs to keep alive? Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has suggested that, with the United States headed toward war with Iraq, he can't spare the manpower to protect Afghanistan's president. This argument is, to put it mildly, unconvincing. Karzai's security detail comprised between 45 and 50 U.S. troops, and defense experts estimate the number of Special Forces to be around 40,000. Nor is the administration's other argument—that private contractors will have a lower profile than U.S. troops and thus attract less local opposition—any more compelling, given that the American commandos wore civilian clothes and their private-sector replacements will also be Americans.

The real answer has to do with Republican dogma. "These people have an ideological preference for private solutions," says Lawrence Korb, who served as assistant secretary of defense in the first Reagan administration. "It's always their first instinct because of their belief in the efficiency and effectiveness of the private sector."

Using DynCorp also offers the Bush administration something it values highly: secrecy and plausible deniability. This is, after all, an administration famous for its disdain of peacekeeping and its opposition to anything that smacks of nation-building and postwar reconstruction. Using hired guns to do the job in Afghanistan allows the White House to maintain rhetorical consistency, even after it has finally recognized that peacekeeping is sometimes unavoidable. And using PMCs keeps the press hounds away. If someone in Karzai's security detail gets killed, it will be a lot easier for Washington to avoid publicity if that someone isn't a soldier. Brooks explains, "If [a private contractor] is shot wearing blue jeans, it's page fifty-three of their hometown newspaper. Brooks's argument has been borne out in Latin America, where five DynCorp employees have been killed since 1995, with little public outcry in the United States.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration's refusal to take public responsibility for its work in Afghanistan isn't lost on the government it is trying to protect. As Representatives Tom Lantos and Henry Hyde recently said in a joint statement, "[T]he presence of commercial vendors [protecting Karzai] would send a message to the Afghan people and to President Karzai's adversaries that we are not serious enough about our commitment to Afghanistan to dispatch U.S. personnel."

Washington will therefore lose out all around. By refusing to protect Karzai itself, the United States is snubbing a key ally. But it won't win itself any real deniability either. If anything goes wrong with the mission and someone is killed—whether it's Karzai, one of his guards, or an innocent bystander—Afghans will blame the United States anyway. No one will pay much attention to the fact that the bodyguards were technically private employees; they will care only that they messed up the job.

Unfortunately, by hiring DynCorp, the Bush administration has upped the odds that that's exactly what's going to happen. ■

Seoul Dispatch

Cash Flow

By ERIC WEINER

STRANGE THINGS ARE happening in North Korea. Strange, that is, even by North Korean standards. Editorials in the Communist Party newspaper, *Rodong Sinmun*, sing the praises of the free market. Kim Il Sung University is offering a course in capitalism. And—this is the strangest of all—the country where citizens were told that their leader was a sun provided by heaven recently opened its first Internet café, a tiny room in Pyongyang crammed with a bank of five dusty desktop computers. No, you cannot buy a latte there, and ordinary North Koreans, some of the poorest people in Asia, can't

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afford the exorbitant connection fee. But, still, an Internet café in North Korea?

While the world fixates on the Stalinist regime's secret nuclear weapons program, it has largely overlooked another program, one that may ultimately determine North Korea's fate. North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il is flirting with capitalism. The courtship is in its early stages and no commitments have been made, but Kim Jong Il appears smitten with some aspects of the free market—a development Pyongyang watchers say could prompt the most dramatic change on the peninsula since the end of the Korean War. So, while foreign strategists calculate missile throw weights and nuclear capacity, North Korea's future may hang on much more down-to-earth math: the price of rice at a Pyongyang street stall or the take-home pay of a weary factory worker. James Carville's pithy slogan, it turns out, travels well: It *is* the economy, stupid.

NORTH KOREA LAUNCHED the reforms the way it does everything else: in the dark. In fact, Pyongyang's foray into capitalism has been shrouded in nearly as much secrecy as its nuclear weapons program, perhaps because Kim Jong Il realizes that the forces unleashed by the reforms may prove just as powerful and unpredictable. Ordinary North Koreans never received any advance warning, but, on July 1, many workers received an enormous 18-fold pay raise. Meanwhile, the government has begun liberalizing prices, phasing out state subsidies for industries, and discontinuing the ration coupons that, for the past 50 years, North Koreans have exchanged for rice, clothing, and other staples. The most productive workers will soon receive bonuses. Simply put, North Korean workers are now earning money.

Not only has Kim Jong Il begun opening the domestic economy, he has also started to invite foreigners in. He has designated the sleepy industrial town of Shinuiju, located near the northern border with China, as a free-trade zone, a kind of alternative universe where foreigners will be allowed to brazenly commit capitalism. The zone will have its own legal system, its own currency, and even its own passports, a setup similar to the special economic zones Deng Xiaoping created in Guangdong Province across the border from Hong Kong in the early '80s.

All of this requires a powerful imagination. Today, Shinuiju looks as unremarkable as the rest of impoverished North Korea. Dusty and drab, the entire city "looks like it needs a good hosing down," according to one recent visitor. Like most of North Korea, Shinuiju appears stuck in time, somewhere between the 1930s and the 1950s. Farmers work the fields by hand. The roads are in disrepair and almost completely empty. But, soon, that will change.

Though Kim Jong Il rarely states his true intentions—it is far easier for journalists to gain a visa to Iraq than one to North Korea—his motives for opening the economy seem clear. Like China's leaders, Kim Jong Il wants to hold onto power, and some economic growth is crucial to remaining in charge. Marcus Noland, a longtime North Korea watcher with the Institute for International Economics, puts it this way, "Although they may be weird, the North Koreans are not suicidal." That explains Kim Jong Il's recent trips across the border, ogling the Shanghai Stock Exchange and factories with foreign investments. It explains Shinuiju, too. China also started with Deng's special economic zones, isolated laboratories cordoned off from the rest of China, where technocrats could safely experiment with the powerful forces of capitalism without abetting political liberalization. And, to some extent, it even explains the nukes. Unlike Iraq, which wields weapons of mass destruction to threaten its neighbors, North Korea wields them to shake down its neighbors for cash.

Skeptics point out that so far Pyongyang's changes mainly amount to a recalibration of the economy, a tacit acknowledgement that North Korea's flourishing black market has overtaken the official rationing system. And, the skeptics say, North Korea has started down the reform path before, only to turn away. The one lasting legacy of the Rajin-Sonbong free-trade zone—started one decade ago—is a casino favored by wealthy Chinese.

Other foreign investors, however, believe that this time Pyongyang has passed the point of no return and that the reforms will drastically impact Northern society. "North Korea is willing to do business," says one consultant who regularly travels to Pyongyang. He points to the fact that North Korea is allowing some foreign firms to repatriate profits as evidence that, this time, Pyongyang is serious about reform. Taking up the offer, foreign companies have already made small investments in such diverse fields as animation, computer software, and agriculture. So far, these investments don't add up to much, at least not in dollar terms; Pyongyang does less trade in one year than Seoul does in 48 hours. But they are a start, and economists expect the North to capture several information technology contracts this year. The Swiss company Datactivity has been running a joint-venture data-entry center in Pyongyang since 1997.

What's more, because North Korea is much smaller than China, it is more difficult to isolate a free-trade zone—the way Beijing did—that doesn't "infect" the rest of the nation. Already, Kim Jong Il's embryonic reforms have widened the scope of acceptable discourse in North Korea. "I've seen a greater willingness to discuss areas of economic reform that simply weren't on the table before," one frequent visitor to Pyongyang told me. Not that long ago, even mentioning words like reform or—gasp!—profit would cause North Korean officials to literally walk out of the room. And, even in China, the reforms initiated in the special economic zones have impacted the rest of the country, forcing the Communist Party to loosen its political stranglehold and its restrictions on the free flow of information.

Ordinary North Koreans are beginning to grasp the potential impact of the economic reforms as well, visitors to the North say. Unlike Kim Jong Il's nuclear shenanigans, the economic changes will affect each and every citizen. They won't affect them equally, though. "There will be winners and

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losers," says Noland. The winners are likely to include farmers, because of the substantial price increases for grains and other crops, and other people with access to hard currency. The losers: civil servants, professors, and other members of what passes for a middle class in North Korea, who have less access to greenbacks.

For Kim Jong Il, of course, the stakes are even higher. If the reforms fail and the country's economy weakens even further, North Korea's regime may finally collapse. As Park Suhk Sam, an analyst at South Korea's central bank, has noted, China liberalized prices step by step over a period of ten years, but North Korea has liberalized prices all at once, a move that could throw a nascent pseudo-capitalist economy into turmoil. The North also lacks the natural resources, massive workforce, and access to expatriate Chinese capital that Beijing enjoyed.

But Kim Jong Il faces another, equally vexing scenario. What if the reforms actually succeed? This could prove equally disastrous, since a thriving, more affluent North Korea sounds an awful lot like, well, *South* Korea. So Kim Jong Il, who surely fancies himself another Deng Xiaoping, runs the risk of becoming another Mikhail Gorbachev: a man who turns out the lights on an experiment that has run its course. ■

Are medical residents working too hard?

Resident Aliens

By SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE

ON A JUNE afternoon a few months ago, a general surgeon named Charles Ferguson faced a peculiar problem. Ferguson is a 49-year-old associate professor at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and the director of the hospital's surgical residency program. He is a square-jawed Southerner, about five feet ten inches, and speaks with a soft Georgia drawl. Everything about him—from his calm, well-stitched sentences to his rehearsed half-smile—is designed to reassure you that the operation is going smoothly and that things are perfectly under control.

Ferguson's newest problem, though, wasn't the typical calamity a surgeon is trained to fix. Last November, Representative John Conyers Jr., a Democrat from Michigan, introduced a bill in the House that claimed hospital patients in general and Medicare recipients (nearly 40 million Americans over age 65) in particular were getting slipshod care in teaching hospitals because of drowsy and overworked residents. The bill, HR 3236, argued that sleep-deprived resident physicians were much more likely to make critical errors in patient care and proposed stringent federal regulations on resident work hours.

Even before Congress had a chance to consider the bill, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)—a national organization that oversees all residents—mounted a massive, preemptive response. Scrambling to placate the public, the ACGME ginned up a set of totally new stipulations for resident work hours. Starting in July 2003, residents will no longer be allowed to work more than 80 hours per week; in addition, shifts longer than 24 hours will be banned. In mid-June, the ACGME sent notice to all programs around the country, asking them to bring their training programs to heel. And that's when Ferguson suddenly found himself with an onerous task: revamping MGH's surgical training program to meet the ACGME's regulations.

"Imagine the actual details," Ferguson said dejectedly, walking me through the task. "We start off by cutting out several hours of the workweek. That means that the residents won't be able to scrub in to as many cases. And that means someone—some committee or other—will have to decide what's necessary and unnecessary in training. Do you need to remove five gallbladders or ten before you can do the surgery safely?" Ferguson seemed melancholy at the prospect of all the changes. "The council has really asked us to rethink the residency system itself," he added. "But that means breaking down the entire culture of residency, the very basis of our teaching and training. Why would *anyone* want to do that?"

THE "CULTURE OF RESIDENCY" Ferguson was referring to is peculiar to the American health care system. And the culture's most outlandish quirk is the unrelenting work habits of residents. Residents in Canada and in the United Kingdom typically work well under 80 hours per week. In American teaching hospitals, by contrast, the work has exploded: Interns and residents, particularly in surgery, often log more than 100 hours per week. As one surgery resident described his years of training, it was "all surgery, all the time."

But the bizarre work habits of this culture beg a more fundamental question: How did the system evolve to this breaking point? What about residency—unlike any other

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apprenticeship in any profession—makes such absurd hours seem necessary?

At least part of the answer can be found in the nature of the work itself. A few months ago, as I watched a neurosurgery resident struggle through a particularly harrowing night, the formidable hours seemed almost like a necessary evil. At about two o'clock on a Saturday morning, the resident—call him Derek—was asleep in the hospital when he was paged down to the emergency room. A woman in her fifties had fallen down earlier in the evening, gone to sleep, and then woken up in the middle of the night with the "worst headache of her life." A headache of that intensity can be an ominous sign of bleeding inside the brain. Within minutes of arriving, the woman was whisked off to the CT scanner. "It's a subarachnoid bleed," the emergency-room attending said. A golf-ball-sized clot had already formed in the brain.

One way of dealing with a subarachnoid hemorrhage involves drilling a hole about as wide as a pencil into the patient's head so that a probe, called a "bolt," can sit directly inside the brain. The probe monitors minute-to-minute variations in pressure. Should the brain start swelling, as it often does after a bleed, the bolt immediately detects the rising pressure inside the cranium, and neurosurgeons can try a whole volley of medicines to bring the pressure down. "Set up the bolt apparatus," barked Derek, glancing at the clock. It was three o'clock already.

The bolt took Derek about an hour to place. But, as it turned out, his evening was just warming up. An hour after the probe was in place, just as he was about to doze off, Derek was paged to the intensive care unit (ICU). There was a snag in the bolt, and it had to be fixed immediately. By then it was 5:30 a.m., and the situation was growing out of hand. Within half an hour, the operating rooms would start swinging into action, and Derek would need to be ready for his morning shift: At 6:30, he was scheduled to scrub in to the operating room for a brain-tumor resection that could easily stretch into the mid-afternoon. But, having started the procedure in the ICU, he couldn't leave it hanging. And so, nearly 36 hours into his call, Derek set to work fixing the bolt. By six he had fixed the glitch. He showered and, after two or three urgently slugged cups of coffee, scrubbed in to the surgery minutes before it started.

I saw Derek briefly later that day. It was noontime, and he was still seven hours from the end of his shift. He swallowed a sandwich on the fly and ran upstairs to check the bolt he had placed the night before. In the afternoon, he scrubbed in to a second case in the operating room. At 7 p.m. Saturday night, he left the hospital. The call had stretched well beyond its fortieth hour. Most likely, he would return to the hospital early the next morning, and the cycle would begin again.

Even with my own brutal schedule as a nonsurgical resident, I couldn't fathom how Derek and his surgical colleagues endured the stress. Marathon runners sometimes use the word "wall" to describe a point in their race, usually at about 20 miles, when the level of physical exhaustion hits them like a brick, and every stride becomes nearly physically impossible. As far as I could see, Derek was hitting his wall every on-call night, and this pattern would continue for a year. The performance was heroic. But there was also something troublesome, even pathetic, about it. A training program that routinely expected superhuman acrobatics from its trainees seemed perverse. And, watching Derek struggle through that evening, I began to wonder how on earth residencies had gotten themselves into this fix in the first place.

WHEN I PRESENTED Derek's dilemma to some of my colleagues, arguments broke out at the lunch table. My fellow residents broadly fell into two camps, which I began to call the "Cynics" and the "Whipplers."

The Cynics were convinced that residency was designed to exploit residents and that their hours simply reflected that. Residents like Derek, they said, are perhaps the cheapest skilled labor in the country. At about $10 per hour, paid partly by Medicare, residents provide massive subsidies to any teaching hospital. And teaching hospitals—already in the throes of fiscal crisis—squeeze as much as possible out of residents in order to keep themselves afloat. Worse still, since the number of residents ultimately determines the number of physicians in every specialty, every specialty has a tacit incentive to keep a tight lid on its number of trainees. Specialty physicians keep their numbers carefully controlled so that the volume of patients per physician never dips too low.

The Whipplers disagreed. They acknowledged that hospitals might exploit residents. But wasn't the hospital providing them with education in return? The *real* purpose of the grueling residency schedule, the Whipplers argued, was to meet the specialized needs of an increasingly complex health care system. It wasn't the hospital that was the problem; it was the complexity of medicine that residents were expected to learn.

"Take, for example, a Whipple," a young surgeon told me over a quick meal in the hospital cafeteria. A Whipple procedure is one of the most notoriously complicated in surgery. In it, a part of the pancreas—a leaf-like sheet of tissue under the stomach—is excised in the hope of cutting away a tumor. The gall bladder and the distal bile ducts are also removed. Part of the stomach is cut away to reveal a blunt end, like the edge of a floppy pig's-ear, and, finally, the stumps of the stomach and the bile duct are hooked up to the intestines.

But the success rate of a Whipple depends not only on how well you perform the surgery itself, it also depends on how carefully you care for the patient post-surgery. And that's where residents come in. If the surgeon cuts too deeply into the strands of pancreatic tissue, the pancreas might release toxic enzymes that rapidly destroy the body. If the sutures in the intestine aren't perfectly positioned, they can rupture, leading to a devastating infection. The on-call resident's job thus involves managing all of these terrible complications. In other words, residency programs, the Whipplers argued, evolved their over-the-top work hours precisely to accommodate the practice of increasingly complex medicine.

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If the Cynics and the Whipplers agreed on one thing, however, it was that the residents were victims of a system they couldn't control. But, a few days later, I stumbled on a much more subtle explanation of the work-hours crisis. When I asked Derek how he might have handled his call night better, his answer was flabbergastingly simple: He said he should just have worked faster.

"But why didn't you call a backup?" I persevered. Or why not call the operating room and confess that the night had been testy and that—for his own safety and the patient's—it would be best if he took the morning off? Derek looked at me blankly. The bolt had been his responsibility. Passing it off to another doctor or buckling under the strain of a call night seemed impermissible, options that were erased even before they were considered.

That fact—that unflappable, recalcitrant individualism and the willful internalization of responsibility that comes with it—was reiterated to me again and again by residents. Most residents in Derek's position couldn't imagine transferring the task to another doctor in the middle of the night. In mid-June, when Ferguson convened a meeting with the resident surgeons at MGH to talk about the reduced work hours, he half-expected them to be overjoyed about the cuts. Instead, he said triumphantly, "Many of them were just indignant." Residents complained bitterly about work hours, but, when push came to shove, they could not bring themselves to pass off work to others. In other words, at least part of the reason for the work-hour crisis actually lay in the culture of medicine itself—a culture that had evolved for nearly 100 years.

THAT CULTURE, MOST medical historians agree, was invented almost single-handedly in the 1890s by a brilliant, enigmatic, and cantankerous doctor from Baltimore named William Halsted. Halsted was a professor of surgery at Johns Hopkins University and acting surgeon at the university's newly opened hospital. During his 33 years at Hopkins, Halsted not only concocted novel surgical procedures that would forever alter modern medicine, he also drafted a blueprint for the most awe-inspiring surgical-residency program in history.

Stubborn, solemn, and seriously bewhiskered, Halsted might have looked like the prototypical nineteenth-century professor, but his life had several unexpected twists. By his mid-forties, Halsted had already teetered on the edge of several breakdowns, often following periods of compulsive overwork. In 1886, just before he arrived at Hopkins, Halsted was released from Butler Hospital, where he had spent three years recovering from a cocaine addiction. The addiction started in the mid-'80s, when Halsted experimented with cocaine as an anesthetic for patients (and, perhaps, as a stimulant for himself). Within a few years, though, the frantic experiments had taken on a life of their own, and Halsted rapidly spiraled into his addiction.

That breakdown may have been his second or even third. In 1875, Halsted spent the summer on Block Island, off Rhode Island, recuperating from another near-collapse. Two years of intense activity in medical school had left him, according to physician-historian John Cameron, writing in 1997 in the journal *Annals of Surgery*, "run down, fatigued and unable to study." In 1877, the same pattern recurred: At the end of his internship, Halsted had again worked himself to the fraying point, leaving most of his friends deeply concerned about the precarious state of his health.

It is no surprise, then, that this frenetic work ethic—exertion to the point of collapse—would be indelibly imprinted on Halsted's brainchild, Hopkins's surgical-residency program. To be sure, Halsted's obsessive concerns about work ethics and the quality of surgical training were largely warranted. In the 1890s, surgical training in the United States was based on ad-hoc curricula, slap-dashed together by teaching hospitals without uniform standards. Without a formal system of training, surgical residencies churned out inadequately trained surgeons. As Cameron wrote. "There were few qualified individuals, and those qualified often were more interested in private practice. ... Because there was no formal training in surgery, most surgeons were self-taught." ("There is no more science in surgery than in butchering," Lord Thurlow had told the House of Lords in England in the early 1800s.) Nearly 100 years later, when Halsted strode into the halls of Hopkins, American surgeons were still struggling to distinguish themselves from butchers, barbers, and quacks.

At Hopkins, then, Halsted set out to create a training program of such distinction that the discipline's reputation would be forever unassailable. And part of that reputation, Halsted realized, would derive from the intensity of the work itself. For his "Hopkins experiment," as some medical historians still call it, Halsted handpicked a group of residents who were prepared to put in "twelve or fourteen years of hard work, very hard work, in order to secure this prize." Halsted recognized that his program wasn't for the faint of heart. "It will be objected that this is too long an apprenticeship, that the young surgeon will be stale, his enthusiasm gone before he has completed his arduous term of service," he acknowledged in an address to Yale Medical School in 1904. "These positions are not for those who so soon weary of the study of their profession."

The Darwinian logic of this system appealed to Halsted. Residency was explicitly designed to be a rite of passage through which every resident would pass, until only the very best had survived. Like medical licensure, which was invented in the late 1880s to discriminate doctors from quacks, Halsted's system was a means of distinguishing a new generation of surgical trainees from their untrained predecessors. It was a system goaded by a peculiar anxiety: the threat of mediocrity. If surgeons didn't feel the overwhelming burden of responsibility, Halsted believed, his trainees would soon start slithering down into terribly ordinary creatures.

That niggling anxiety pervades medicine even today. "We'll end up training M.D.s, not doctors," Ferguson said morosely about his mandate to cut residents' hours. At the time, Halsted's experiment in residency training was rapidly adopted

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as a template for surgical training in nearly every hospital in the United States. Today, the culture he created is internalized by surgeons—by all physicians, perhaps—and is a virtually unshakable feature of modern medicine itself.

The downside of that anxiety, however, is that residency programs never shook off the stubborn individualism Halsted bred. What Halsted's experiment did not evolve—perhaps even stifled—was an alternative system of organization, a more humble one that would have adapted to today's needs. It did not design strategies that might have allowed Derek to leave his bolt to someone else or create a safety valve that would have prevented him from scrubbing in to surgery after an improbably busy night on call. The overweening responsibility, the guts-and-glory excitement of medicine, proved to be addictive for the Hopkins residents—and for Derek and his colleagues. And asking doctors to start worrying about prosaic details, such as time sheets and backup schedules, requires a dramatic alteration in a culture of individualism that has persisted for nearly a century.

THE POINT OF all of this is rather simple: There's a chance that the high-strung work ethic of the residency system evolved because of a curious quirk of history and personality. Now that the system has reached its breaking point, a new generation of doctors needs to decide which parts are still working and which parts urgently need reform.

There is a quick and superficial solution that involves slashing excessive hours, revamping call nights and schedules, and meeting required sleep quotas. When the ACGME guidelines are in place, it's more than likely that those requirements will be met. But there's also a deeper and more controversial solution, and it involves identifying what went wrong with the "Hopkins experiment" and the surgical culture that Ferguson was asked to revamp.

Ironically, the characteristic that made the Halstedian residency so triumphantly successful in the nineteenth century may be precisely what makes it seem so hopelessly ossified today. In the early years of Halstedian surgery, the work ethic legitimized the discipline and created role models for future surgeons. But, as the surgeon and writer Atul Gawande pointed out in an essay in *The American Journal of Surgery* in June 2001, surgery itself went through an amazing overhaul during the following decades. More and more, the success of surgery began to rely on what Gawande calls "high-level team performance." And, with the evolution of these "team-based" systems, an unexpected pattern surfaced: The team began to emerge as more important than the performance of any individual on it.

This pattern has been studied quite extensively. When doctors in the Veteran's Administration system documented why some hospitals were able to perform cardiac surgery with relative ease while others were riddled with complications, they had half-expected, as Halsted might have, that the differences would track with the competence of the surgeon involved. In fact, they found that the real difference was in the competence of the team and the systems of care as a whole. What emerged was a picture deeply counterintuitive and troubling for the Halstedian camp: In surgery today, groups of individuals with divided responsibilities typically outperform single individuals with focused responsibilities.

That in itself is an enormous challenge to the self-image of doctors. Even today, practicing medicine tends to bring out a quiet heroism within caregivers. And, while that certainly makes medicine a special profession, it can also degenerate into a self-confident omnipotence. Doctors fall prey to it easily. And patients are just as easily mesmerized by it. Even at the Mayo Clinic, which prides itself on its team system, patients were still most satisfied with their care when a picture of "their" doctor was pasted on the wall near their hospital beds.

But as surgery, indeed all of medicine, morphs into something radically different, these priorities need to change. The overwhelming burden of liability thrust upon Derek that night was heady and exhilarating. But what he really needed was to bow away from *his* bolt in order to minimize the risk to his patient. And only part of the solution to Derek's problem involves setting rigorous work-hour limitations. The deeper change requires forcing all of medicine—patients as well as doctors—to accept its own all-too-human shortcomings, to impose human limits, and to rethink the way doctors practice medicine.

IN RETROSPECT, ALL this seems to add up to a neat prescription: Dispense with the overburdened individual, change medical care to a team system, and see the doctor in the morning. Unfortunately, as with real medicine, that answer comes with its own series of complications. Teams, which have been instituted in nearly every teaching hospital in recent years, are riddled with problems. For one thing, patients used to the old-school practice of medicine find the new "team system" completely bewildering. Instead of having a single doctor, they suddenly find themselves encountering a group of doctors. Doctors often "round" as a team, presenting cases to each other and then cross-examining each other's decisions. This can quickly become frustrating for patients: As doctors rotate in and out of shifts, "your" doctor at four o'clock in the afternoon may be different from "your" doctor at ten o'clock in the morning. Worse still, one doctor might openly disagree with another. From a patient's perspective, the hospital—already a breeding ground for bedlam—seems to degenerate into complete chaos.

What's more, thanks to the merry-go-round mechanics of this process, information gets lost, which can lead to another nexus of errors. Divided responsibilities can diffuse responsibility so that residents, shielded by a "team," might feel the urge to shirk work off on others. All in all, few people seem happy about how teams work in medicine today. As the director of the internal medicine program at MGH put it, "Whenever you sit down to think about medical education, you realize that it's just like any other experiment. Just as you have fixed one problem, there is always more to be done."

Despite the difficulties, some of these changes will have to happen, even if doctors (and patients) aren't ready. And that

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is perhaps the most important feature of the ACGME recommendations. If the Conyers bill did nothing else but make doctors question why we are so fanatically fixated on certain idiosyncrasies inherited from history, it will have had a profound impact on the practice of medicine. With that sort of self-awareness, we might be able to tweak the residency system to meet the requirements of *our* era, just as Halsted tweaked it to meet his. Of course, some might perceive that as a slap in the face of medical tradition. But the good doctor Halsted, exacting, cantankerous maverick that he was, probably would have encouraged it. ■

The wonderful idea of Harold Ford.

Hurry Up

By RYAN LIZZA

WHEN HAROLD FORD JR. enters the press gallery with a gaggle of conservative Democrats in tow, it seems his quixotic campaign for Democratic minority leader is finally gaining momentum. It is the day before the scheduled vote, and Ford and his staff had told reporters that the Blue Dog coalition would be endorsing him today. But Dennis Moore of Kansas issues a small clarification: This isn't a Blue Dog–coalition endorsement, just personal endorsements from ten Blue Dogs. Most of the 29 conservatives in the coalition will apparently back Nancy Pelosi, the San Francisco Democrat.

That's not very surprising. Many House Democrats complain that Ford hasn't done much to prove his leadership. His father, Harold Ford Sr., was a machine politician reelected by his Memphis district for 22 years. When Ford Sr. retired in 1996, Ford Jr. ran for his father's seat, his yard signs and bumper stickers making the most of this legacy: "JR." was all they said. Easily elected, at 26 he became the youngest member of the House and was chosen Democratic freshman class president. In 1998, he won reelection with 79 percent of the vote and hasn't drawn a Republican challenger for the last two cycles.

What's more, before announcing his candidacy for minority leader last Friday, Ford had made no effort to climb the greasy pole of the Democratic caucus. He has never served as a ranking member of a committee or subcommittee. Until now, he'd never even run for a House leadership slot. He is not known as someone who has mastered the legislative or parliamentary process, and he doesn't have any great policy achievements. Outside of his home state of Tennessee, he has done little of the fund-raising and campaigning that win aspiring leaders favor with fellow members. Again and again, his critics and even admirers ask the same question: "What has he done?"

Consider Ford's role in the race between Republican Anne Northrup and Democrat Jack Conway for Kentucky's third district in the last election. Northrup was considered one of the most vulnerable House Republicans, and, to help challengers like Conway, the party instituted a "buddy" system in which safe incumbents would campaign for particular candidates. Ford was assigned to Conway. The only problem was that he never did any of the fund-raising or campaigning expected of him. Finally, close to Election Day, a furious Dick Gephardt intervened and called Ford, demanding he get to Kentucky. The night before he arrived, Ford called Conway's staff, but by then there were no useful events they could set up. He campaigned for about half a day. Northrup won by four points and scored an impressive 20 percent of the black vote—a constituency with which Ford, African American himself, obviously could have helped Conway.

It wasn't the first time Ford had bucked party elders. In 1999, he barnstormed across Tennessee to test the waters for a Senate run against Republican Bill Frist but opted out of the race the following year without giving Democrats ample time to pick a strong challenger. (When Ford thought about jumping into this year's race to replace Tennessee Senator Fred Thompson, Democrats made it clear that their nominee would be Bob Clement, a seven-term Tennessee representative.) One of his more famous scraps with the party brass came in 1998, when he mischievously badmouthed Gephardt and the Democratic leadership in a profile in *The New York Times Magazine*. Responding to Gephardt's criticism of New Democrats, Ford told the *Times*, "I reject what Gephardt says. How many shots do you continue to give the same management?"

His last spat with the party establishment came two years later, when his friend Al Gore invited him to deliver the keynote address to the Democratic National Convention. As usual, the media wrote laudatory profiles about the 30-year-old, black, Southern New Democrat who represented the future of the party. Behind the scenes, however, Gore's aides were not as praiseworthy. They complained that he was a headache to work with. They were disappointed with his initial version of the speech, but, when they dispatched writers to fix it, Ford dug in his heels. "Harold Ford deeply resented this," says one Democratic strategist who was involved. Gore's senior aides were so frustrated that they actually bumped the keynote address out of its prime-time slot. (Months later, they learned that Ford had relied on Republican media consultant Frank Luntz to shape the speech.)

If Ford wants to be taken seriously, this is the reputation he'll have to overcome. "The biggest criticism is he's undisciplined and immature," says a Democratic strategist who admires him. Says a former Ford staffer, "He's a young man in a hurry." Ford's race against Pelosi hasn't put these concerns to rest. The day after the November 5 election, he popped up on television to kick Gephardt while he was down. It was clear Gephardt was about to resign, but Ford publicly demanded it anyway. Days later, he decided to run for the minority leader post himself, but, rather than appealing directly to his fellow

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members and sending around a letter announcing his candidacy, the way Martin Frost and Pelosi did, Ford called the radio show "Imus in the Morning." He followed that with days of cable-news appearances that left many Democrats grumbling that he was doing little more than laying the groundwork for a run for statewide office in Tennessee, where slapping around a liberal like Pelosi would be a boon. "I think Harold is thinking as much about a Senate career as a House leadership career," says a former senior member of the Democratic caucus, echoing the conventional wisdom.

As hopeless as victory seems for Ford (as THE NEW REPUBLIC goes to press, the night before the election, Pelosi is claiming she has an overwhelming majority of the votes), his audacious little revolt is not bad for the Democrats. After all, his campaign may be the only thing stirring debate within the House Democratic caucus about the direction of the party in the aftermath of its recent defeat. One of the most widespread criticisms of Ford is that he is talking about bold new ideas without offering any. But, on two of the most pressing issues of the day, Iraq and the tax cut, he has put forward views that will take the Democrats further than anything Pelosi has offered. Ford voted for the use-of-force resolution but, in explaining that decision last week, said something simple and profound: "September eleventh changed things for me." In other words, he recognized—as few other Democrats seemed to—that catastrophic terrorism requires a rethinking of how Democrats approach foreign policy. On the Bush tax cut, Ford argues that even as Democrats push for halting cuts in the long term, they should emphasize stimulative cuts like a payroll tax holiday that will help the economy now. The rebate in the original 2001 tax cut was the most popular part of Bush's package, even though Democrats never won credit for it. It makes sense to advocate that kind of stimulus again now.

But what makes Ford interesting isn't just his ideas. It's his constituency. Ford aides claim that as the only representative with membership in the liberal Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), the centrist New Democrat Coalition, and the conservative Blue Dog coalition, he alone can truly unite the party's factions. But what's important about his supporters is not their diversity—Pelosi appears to have the backing of the majority of members in all three groups—but their generation. Most of his allies are either young or new to the House. According to a Ford aide, he has attracted Denise Majette of the CBC, who defeated the clownish and divisive Cynthia McKinney in a Georgia primary earlier this year. Another CBC member backing Ford is William Lacy Clay Jr., who also grew up in Washington as a representative's son and went on to win his dad's old seat. Ford's staff also claims he has the support of Elijah Cummings, who was a 30-something prodigy in the Maryland House of Delegates before entering Congress with Ford in 1996.

Then there's Adam Smith, one of Ford's staunchest allies among New Democrats, who was elected to the Washington State Senate at 25 and came to Congress with Ford. His thinking is emblematic of the small circle of rebels who are promoting Ford's candidacy as an insurgence against an old guard hostile to any criticism. "We spend the first half hour of our caucus meetings kissing each other's butts," Smith says. "We are blind to our mistakes. ... We're trying to make the statement that things need to change." Another rabble-rouser in Ford's inner circle is Brad Carson, a Rhodes scholar from Oklahoma who first won his House seat in 2000 at age 33. He calls what they are doing a "peasants' revolt" and complains about party elders hoarding committee assignments.

Like many of Ford's allies, Carson knows Ford will lose. Yet, for better or worse, he has become the only vehicle for other members to express what is a more widespread dissatisfaction with the Democratic leadership than Ford's actual support suggests. "We may lose this race, but we're not going away," he says, "and, if we are going to be successful, it's going to be people like Harold Ford who will make that happen." Just not yet. ■

Can the Democrats survive Nancy Pelosi?

Follow the Leader

By MICHAEL CROWLEY

AS NANCY PELOSI coasted toward leadership of the demoralized House Democrats this week, her message was as persistent as her trademark smile: I am not a liberal. Throughout her 15 years in the House, Pelosi has made her name as a combative lefty, delighting her San Francisco constituents with trendy causes, celebrity friends, and designer outfits. Once upon a time, she reveled in the "L" word, telling an interviewer in 1996, "I pride myself in being called a liberal. ... I don't consider myself a moderate." Now that she is replacing Richard Gephardt as a national leader of the party, however, and Republicans are lampooning her as a flighty California flake, Pelosi wants you to think of her differently. At a press conference last week, called so she could claim victory in the race for House minority leader, she spoke in fuzzy, unassailable terms about "growing the economy." She insisted that her election says nothing "about the direction of the party." And, to those who invoked the "L" word,

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she unveiled an ingenious new response: "I guess you could describe an Italian-American grandmother that way." Even her fashion sense was toned down. Washington insiders are accustomed to seeing Pelosi resplendent in bright red power suits, smartly accessorized with elegant pearls. But, as she claimed victory from behind a drab podium, Pelosi dressed as neutral as can be in a gray sweater and black-and-white checked jacket. Out with the fashionable California liberal; in with the plain, common-sense grandma.

Pelosi did not grant interviews before her election this week. But, aware that I was writing this article, an aide called me to offer interviews with a handful of supporters who could assure me that Pelosi's liberal reputation was a bunch of nonsense. As testimony to her famously efficient political machine, my phone began ringing within minutes. One Pelosi partisan even called from the presumptive new leader's office, leaving a number where I could reach her. (The number turned out to be the RSVP line for a trademark schmoozefest Pelosi was hosting that night for new and outgoing House members—complete with valet parking!) Pelosi even had New York Representative Joe Crowley, who happens to share my father's name, call on her behalf. I had not previously thought of Crowley as a lead Pelosi supporter and, well aware of Pelosi's political skills, could only wonder whether this was a sophisticated psychological tactic.

It's no surprise that Pelosi is working so hard to dispel the notion that she's a liberal. Already, Republicans are painting her as a combination of Maxine Waters and Barbra Streisand. That's unfair: Pelosi isn't a wild-eyed ideologue; she's just a fairly typical member of the House Democratic caucus. And that's exactly the problem. The caucus was already to the left of most Democratic voters—and far to the left of the country as a whole—even before November 5. And now many of its members have decided that the lesson of last week's election disaster is that the party wasn't liberal *enough*. Pelosi may say her liberalism isn't her defining feature. But it's a big part of why she's about to get promoted. As Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan recently put it, "I don't think anybody's going to become the next minority leader of the Democrats that wants to go along with [George W.] Bush on the war." In other words, Pelosi was chosen in part because she's not expected to challenge the liberal instincts of the House Democratic caucus. Which is a pity. Because, unless someone saves the House Democrats from themselves, they could be looking at a long time in the minority.

PELOSI IS DESERVEDLY proud to be the first woman in the 213-year history of Congress to lead a major party. (At her first leadership meeting she claims to have "felt the spirit of Susan B. Anthony.") More impressive still is how quickly a woman who first ran for office when she was 47 years old has soared through the Washington political ranks. It's a testament to Pelosi's three great skills: manic energy, dazzling charm, and the all-important ability to raise big money.

Born Nancy D'Alesandro, Pelosi grew up in the Little Italy section of Baltimore, where her father was a populist congressman and mayor, and her mother was a political organizer ("a boss," as Pelosi put it to the *Los Angeles Times* recently). Politics ran in the family—her brother also served as the city's mayor—but Nancy only started dabbling in it after she moved to California in 1969 with her husband Paul, a banker. With a large family to raise, Pelosi postponed whatever personal political ambitions she may have had, instead volunteering with the state party. But inevitably she was sucked into the machine. By 1976, she was in the thick of the state's liberal politics, using her Maryland connections to help Jerry Brown engineer an upset victory in the state's presidential primary.

By the 1980s, two themes of her career were already coming into focus. One was her amazing fund-raising touch; the other was a personal charm that some equated with lack of substance. Her ability to raise huge amounts of money earned her a post as chair of the California Democratic Party in 1981, and, when she ran for chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee in 1985, it was with the blessing of party kingpins such as Mario Cuomo and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. After her loss to party activist Paul Kirk, she accused labor leaders who had not supported her of waging an "anti-woman" campaign; one union boss allegedly called her an "airhead." She instead became finance chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, raising money for senators nationwide.

Pelosi's entrée into elective politics finally came in the form of a dying widow's request. For years, Phil Burton had been the Bay Area's powerhouse member of the House. After his 1983 death, his wife Sala took his seat. But she soon fell ill with cancer, and, a few months before her death in 1987, she asked Pelosi to run for her seat. Once again, Pelosi's opponents implied that she was a lightweight "being crowned by the political power brokers," as one put it. And, once again, she displayed her fund-raising acumen, outspending all 13 of her rivals combined en route to victory.

The new representative blew into stuffy Washington like a spring breeze, with the heady air of a socialite. An attractive woman whom Mary McGrory described as "a slim, fine-featured Californian," Pelosi quickly made "Best-Dressed" and "Best Dinner Companion" lists in local publications. She also showed prowess in the area her colleagues respected most: the money chase. The day after a federal judge threw out a California law limiting campaign contributions, Pelosi fired off a letter to her Democrat state delegation colleagues announcing the "good news"—and hitting them up for $10,000 contributions. When Pelosi was (ineffectually) challenged for reelection in 1990, her frustrated opponent branded her "moneybag lady."

PELOSI'S FIRST FORAY into national politics left little doubt about her ideology. As a candidate in 1987, she emphasized the environment and arms control; she even backed local opposition to allowing the U.S. battleship *Missouri* dock in San Francisco with nuclear weapons aboard. After her election,

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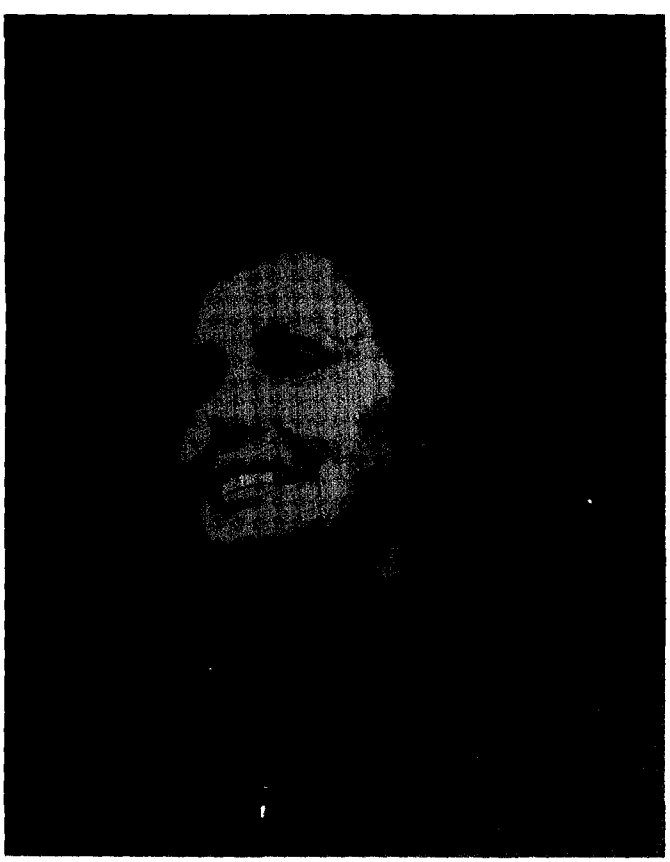
she declared her top priorities to be cutting off aid to the Contras and dramatically boosting AIDS research. And she fought every conceivable battle for gay rights, even calling for legislation to mandate that the U.S. Olympic Committee allow gays to hold athletic competitions under the term "Gay Olympics." (It never happened.)

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Pelosi adamantly opposed military action, lamenting that George H.W. Bush was "resorting to militarization in order to solve a conflict." The war, she said, was an "ill-conceived policy of violence;" Bush, she argued, was acting "illegally." At one January 1991 peace rally, Pelosi turned the president's words against him, declaring, "It is so important that you are here tonight to draw a line in the sand for George Bush." She even delivered a floor speech devoted specifically to opposing the war on environmental grounds, claiming, "The war cloud that would result from exploding oil fields and large-scale bombing of Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other countries in the Middle East would doom the environment for many years to come."

But, even as Pelosi was repelled by America's foreign interventions, she took a keen interest in defending human rights worldwide. In a 1999 interview, Pelosi acknowledged that in San Francisco, "probably more so than in the rest of the country, there's a reluctance to use force. But there's a strong intolerance for human rights violations." And so, from her first years in the House, she became one of Washington's loudest critics of political repression in China. Since her arrival in the House, Pelosi has turned every vote on trade relations with China into a debate about the country's human rights record. When Bill Clinton sought congressional support for humanitarian military interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, Pelosi supported him, citing her memories of Anne Frank's diary.



JOHN RITTER

Pelosi staked out similar ground on domestic policy. Like most Democrats, she almost always advocated more spending and rarely supported tax cuts. Pelosi played little role in the realignment of fiscal policy that defined the Clinton years. In fact, she was not much of a policymaker at all, using her perch on the House Appropriations Committee mostly to fight funding battles for pet causes like the National Endowment for the Arts and family planning overseas. She occasionally defied her liberal label, primarily on trade (an issue of importance to many of her California business donors). Yet on one of the toughest domestic policy questions of the decade, welfare reform, Pelosi took a hard line. The law, she said, was aimed at "reduc[ing] the deficit at the cost of our poorest Americans," and would "thrust millions more into poverty."

ALL THE WHILE, Pelosi was winning friends and influencing people, in large part thanks to her fund-raising wizardry. As late as 1996, she declared that she had no interest in a leadership position, saying she would rather pursue senior House committee positions. But, by 1999, Pelosi was lining up support for a leadership bid. And, when then-Whip David Bonior announced in 2000 that he would leave the House, Pelosi quickly pounced.

The whip's job mainly involves the grunt work of head-counting, cajoling, and policing the House floor to maintain party discipline on votes. But the race took on an ideological flavor when Pelosi drew a strong opponent in Maryland Democrat Steny Hoyer, a House veteran with a more moderate image. Hoyer, whose base of support consisted of House centrists and pragmatists, suggested that Pelosi was too liberal for a Democratic House caucus that would have to appeal to rural conservative swing voters to regain a majority. Pelosi shied away from an ideological confrontation, however, minimizing her differences with Hoyer ("The idea of right-left, moderate-conservative-liberal doesn't mean very much," she argued).

Instead, the race became a glorified popularity contest. Charm, tactics, and, in this case, money played the deciding roles. For months, Pelosi wooed members with exclusive dinners and lobbied them relentlessly. In an effort to pick up the support of undecided California moderate Cal Dooley, she enlisted several of the state's major Democratic donors to call Dooley on her behalf. Pelosi's team even gave supporters 7:30 a.m. wake-up calls on October 10 of last year, the day of the whip election. Then there was the cash: Hoyer raised an impressive $1.5 million for his fellow members—impressive, that is, until compared with Pelosi's $3.9 million.

With her typical Bay Area panache, Pelosi threw herself a victory party with musical entertainment provided by Steve Miller and former members of the Grateful Dead. Plenty of Democrats were thrilled with Pelosi's ascension—especially her California allies, women, and a group of core liberals who

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follow her with the zeal of what one aide calls "a cult." (Chief among these is George Miller of California, a smart liberal veteran who is one of Pelosi's closest confidantes.) But other Democrats fretted that Pelosi was winning support more through her bank account than any promise of the broader political vision her struggling party desperately needs. "She's just a fund-raiser," complains one aide to a senior House Democrat. "A wealthy woman with a lot of wealthy friends."

MEETING PELOSI, IT'S not hard to understand her popularity. I visited her in her Capitol office shortly after she was elected whip, and she could not have been a more gracious host. She fussed at length over what beverages she had to offer me. (Pelosi is known to throw the best parties in Congress and always has the best food at her meetings, notably raspberry chocolate cake. "Food is central to her political operation," says an aide to a liberal House member. "And it's not a trivial thing. There's a lot of warmth behind that—she's a mother, she's a provider.") She was endearingly humble about her new national prominence. "You have to have a sense of humor about it," she told me. "One minute, you're anonymously buying a loaf of bread in a place you're traveling in, and the next, you're talking to two thousand people." And she spoke about her friendships with pop-culture activists with the casual air of someone who knows enough celebrities not to be awestruck by them. Bono? "Oh, he's great. I saw him again yesterday." Tibet freedom activist Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys? "You know, he's so young. But, again, knowledgeable." Richard Gere, another Tibet activist? "He is an attractive man." It's easy to see why people want to be Pelosi's dinner companion.

But Pelosi's perky charm disguises a steeliness that has helped her climb the House ranks. "She has a mettle to her that is disguised by a wonderful smile," says Rahm Emanuel, the former Clinton aide and incoming Chicago-area representative. "Nancy Pelosi is a take-no-prisoners type of politician," says a senior House aide. That edge has cut both ways, however. On the one hand, her advocates say she's an extremely tough opponent to defeat. But others say her hard-charging style has caused blunders that have led some Democrats to question her political acumen.

For instance, even Pelosi allies were befuddled last winter when she donated $10,000 to Lynn Rivers, an obscure Michigan representative redistricted into a race against John Dingell, a mighty House veteran of 46 years who happened to back Hoyer for whip. Not only did Pelosi infuriate the dean of her caucus, she did so on behalf of an ally, Rivers, who was likely to lose anyway—and ultimately did. Pelosi caused a stir again in June, when she intervened in a dispute over redistricting in New York state, which was slated to lose two seats after the 2000 census. Democrats had feared they would lose both seats but negotiated a deal—approved by Gephardt—in which each party would sacrifice one. But, when Pelosi found out that the Democratic seat slated for extinction belonged to her ally, Louise Slaughter, she called the New York state assembly leader to try to undo the plan. Washington Democratic leaders, with whom she never checked, were furious.

There were other campaign-related blunders as well. Pelosi recently irked several colleagues when a political action committee (PAC) she established was deemed too closely affiliated with another one of her PACs in what looked like an effort to skirt campaign finance limits. Several embarrassed Democrats had to return donations from the PAC just days before the election. Finally, in a May interview with *Time* magazine, Pelosi argued that the party shouldn't waste money on House races in Michigan and Ohio because they were unwinnable—to the great dismay of party officials in those states who were trying to keep up morale. None of these episodes alone would amount to much, but, taken together, they trouble some Democrats. "I've heard members say, 'I love Nancy, but I don't know that she's ready for prime time,'" says a liberal House aide—a sentiment I've heard echoed several times.

Few such complaints are heard about Pelosi's performance as whip. In an early and difficult test, she helped shepherd campaign finance reform through dozens of attempted GOP poison pills, holding together a slim majority that shifted from amendment to amendment. She also maintained a shrewdly sober tone in her suddenly important role as top House Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, a perch she refrained from using for tacky partisan advantage—although she did challenge the White House over an independent commission to investigate the September 11 attacks.

BUT THE LARGER issue is less Pelosi's tactical decision-making than her strategic vision. This was the theme of Texas Representative Martin Frost's campaign against her for minority leader. The race, which had been waged under the radar for months, was publicly decided within days of last week's election, when Pelosi announced that she had the support of a majority of the caucus. Like Hoyer, Frost is a moderate who argued that he better understood how Democrats could appeal to the broad voting public. Most House Democrats hail from safely gerrymandered liberal districts—a circumstance that tends to skew their impressions of the overall electorate. Frost tried to remind his colleagues that although Al Gore won the popular vote in 2000, he carried only 200 of the nation's 435 congressional districts. In other words, if Democrats wanted to reclaim the House, they would need to win voters in pro-Bush districts. Frost was basically arguing for a continuation of the strategy begun by Gephardt, who had recruited conservative candidates for seats in swing districts, downplayed gun control, and dodged a renewed tax-cut debate this year.

Pelosi's critics fret that she has never had to think this way and lacks any experience in framing campaigns to appeal to moderate voters. Frost bragged that, as chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), he helped Democrats pick up five seats in the House in 1998 in areas like Mississippi and New Mexico. ("Frost's DCCC did more with less than any campaign committee in modern history," raved election guru Charlie Cook.) Pelosi, by contrast,

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had little to claim beyond successes in some California House races where her personal impact was hard to gauge. And Pelosi herself, of course, has long represented a safe, liberal seat in a state Democrats largely dominate. Several Democrats recall a January campaign strategy meeting for which Pelosi called in one of her California political advisers. His message—that the party was too fixated on rural swing districts—struck several Democrats as arrogant and clueless. "She perhaps is a little naive about how you win elections," says an experienced party campaign strategist. "If we could have a California playing field every year, we'd elect three hundred twenty members. She's going to have to take a real leap to understand all the mechanics of campaigns."

Frost's allies also warned that Pelosi's cultural identity could become a liability for the party, noting that Republican House candidates used her name to tar Democrats as too liberal in Georgia and New Mexico, and they broadcast her image in a negative ad in Alabama, where candidate Joe Turnham was slammed for "playing ball" with Pelosi, who "opposed President Bush's war on terror." But Frost was never able to make this message stick. Just as she did with Hoyer, Pelosi downplayed ideological differences with her rival, preferring to fight on her own terms—namely, personal alliances and cash. Once again, she out-schmoozed and outraised her opponent—doling out $1 million to fellow Democrats from her PAC—and once again she prevailed.

IN A SENSE, Pelosi's victory was sealed by her stance on Iraq. Although Gephardt made a show of supporting the president's resolution, Pelosi refused to go along, insisting the president spend more time working through the United Nations to find a peaceful solution. Pelosi argued that, as a high-ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, she had seen no evidence to suggest that Iraq posed an imminent threat against the United States. Some reports said Pelosi actually lobbied Democrats against the war, although her allies deny that. "She was collecting numbers and figuring out where people were, but I didn't think she was banging the table on behalf of her own position," says New York Democrat Anthony Weiner. Pelosi wound up backing an alternate Democratic resolution that would have required Bush to return to Congress for the approval to use force if the United Nations would not grant it. When a majority of her caucus joined with Pelosi on Iraq—confounding observers and providing the first evidence that House Democrats didn't buy the conventional wisdom that they should back the president on post-September 11 national security issues—insiders suggested the race for leader had just been decided. The vote was a defining moment for House Democrats, who felt that Gephardt's support for the president embodied all that was wrong with the party's centrist leadership.

However popular this view may be within the House Democratic caucus, though, there's little evidence that more strident opposition would have benefited the party. In fact, Democratic strategists who closely monitored House campaigns around the country say opposition to Bush on Iraq did serious damage to Democrats nationwide. "Our polls show that the week the Iraq debate started, the race went south," says a House leadership aide. "The week the Baghdad three"—Democrats Jim McDermott, David Bonior, and Mike Thompson, all of whom criticized Bush from Iraq in early October—"started, the race went south." In a tightly contested race in Indiana's second congressional district, for instance, the Iraq debate caused Democrat Jill Long Thompson's fortunes to plummet quickly en route to a loss to Republican Chris Chocola.

Moderate Democrats worry that Pelosi, like many of her House allies, believes last week's electoral rout proves that Democrats need to veer back to a more confrontational liberal position, especially on foreign policy. "I don't think the lesson of this election is that Democrats should have been more forceful in opposing the president on the war," says a party strategist. "In the last decade, foreign policy was mainly taken off the table as an issue for Democrats. And now, it's back on the table. And voters aren't going to vote for a party they don't feel safe with." As Washington-state Representative Adam Smith, co-chairman of the House New Democrat coalition, puts it, "If Democrats conclude from this that Jim McDermott was right, then we're gonna be buried."

No one expects liberal Democrats to vote against their consciences. But they do need to understand how the public perceives them—an instinct that can only be honed by experience appealing to the political center. Yet none of the Pelosi allies with whom I spoke would even entertain the notion that their opposition to the president's Iraq policy had not played well on November 5. Massachusetts Representative Barney Frank scoffed that operatives with polling data showing the war to be a campaign liability were peddling "bullshit." California's Anna Eshoo said questions about the party's national security image amounted to "Beltway think." She also pointed out that Bush has wound up doing precisely what House Democrats wanted—working hard through the Security Council. Yet that ignores the strong evidence that Bush has only succeeded at the United Nations thanks to the threat of unilateral action—a threat made credible by the use-of-force resolution, which most House Democrats opposed. While Pelosi has not made these arguments herself in the aftermath of the election debacle, it's worth noting that they were repeatedly offered by supporters she had explicitly deputized to call on her behalf.

Ultimately, many Democrats say that Pelosi's personal beliefs don't matter as much as those of her caucus—that a House "leader" actually spends more time placating than leading. But last week's election—in which the party's liberal base largely turned out, but swing voters broke Republican—proved that what the Democrats need right now is strong, credible moderates to save the liberals from themselves. In the '90s, Clinton was able to do this; to some extent, so was Gephardt. Pelosi has yet to show any sign that she's prepared to follow suit. "She has got her beliefs," says her communications director, Brendan Daly. "But we are here to win, and she understands that to do that you need to be in the middle." For now, we'll just have to take his word for it. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Forces of Life

ADVANCE PUBLICITY FOR **El Crimen del Padre Amaro** (Samuel Goldwyn) came in the news columns. (Apparently the film will keep its Spanish title here, untranslated to *The Crime of Father Amaro*.) A month before it opened in the United States, we could read about the storm it had raised in its country of origin, Mexico. This story of a young Catholic priest who impregnates one of his parishioners, a girl of sixteen, has disturbed the church and has been an enormous success with the public. The nub of the news report, for me, was not in the reaction of the church, nor even in the crowds that scurried to the film. (People everywhere like vengeance—inside stuff about those who have authority over them.) The main question was: how did the picture get made? The Mexican church has influence over its communicants—more than ninety percent of the population is Catholic—and there is governmental censorship. But the current president, Vicente Fox, devoutly Catholic though he is, refused to interfere with freedom of expression, and this film is freely expressive. So, despite the church's denunciation of the film as a "frontal attack" on the clergy, despite the threat that the film's stars would be excommunicated, the picture opened and the audiences flocked. One Mexican bishop admitted that the church's campaign had been "counterproductive."

In the United States the situation is somewhat different, substantial though the Catholic population is and stringent though censorship can still be. After all, the alphabet of American literature begins with a scarlet letter. Even though the film will probably arouse protest in various places, America is more and more proud of its tolerance, its unshockability. Truly to offend the urban population in most of this country—a country that snuggles up with *The Sopranos* once a week—a film would have to get wilder than *Padre Amaro*. Indeed, the media is so saturated these days with reports of churchmen's misbehavior (mostly homosexual) that the advance buzz about this picture may make it sound redundant. It isn't.

The first jolt is that the screenplay was not torn from today's headlines: it was adapted, by Vicente Leñero, from a nineteenth-century Portuguese novel by the distinguished writer Eça de Queirós. Next, and even more to the credit of Vicente Fox's liberalism, the affair between the young priest and the girl, though certainly predominant, is far from the total of the film's broadsides. Father Amaro has been sent to a small town for his first post as aide to an older priest, and that priest has a long-term mistress, a widow who calls herself a "priest's whore," suggesting that this is a fairly common category for women. Other priests in the region are caught up in various illicit dealings, especially with drug lords. Possibly not a crime but certainly disobedient to clerical authority is another priest's service to guerrillas, whom he simply sees as Catholics in need of him. A more accurate title for this film would be *Fathers and Sins*.

The director Carlos Carrera, who is acceptably talented, keeps the story on track—on its various tracks. The black-and-white cinematography by Guillermo Granillo is in the shadow-laced tradition of the fine Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa. Father Amaro is given verity by Gael García Bernal, who was one of the two sexual scamps in *Y Tu Mamá También*. Ana Claudia Talancón is appealing as the girl. Further notes of authenticity are sounded in various registers by all the others in the sturdy cast.

However others may object to this film, I offer my own protest. Here is a priest who not only violates his oath of chastity but suggests to his pregnant girlfriend that she marry a former boyfriend. When that doesn't work out, the priest arranges for an abortion, illegal both in the church and in the Mexican state. The abortion goes wrong—I tip the ending to specify the film's gall—and the priest is left with the girl's death on his hands. And for all these aberrant actions, what does he suffer? Nothing. Hawthorne's Dimmesdale ends with exposure and death. Father Amaro just goes on being a priest, apparently in the belief that expiation lies in priestly service, as before. In our last glimpse of him he is celebrating a funeral mass for the girl in a crowded church. This struck one viewer as pretty cool.

Occasionally a film's virtues tug at us even when we know that they are more compensatory than decisive. **Tully** (Telltale) is one such.

Here is life in Nebraska farm country today. Tully is a farmer with two grown sons and a secret. In the course of the film, the secret is told, and it greatly affects the sons. A money crisis crunches the father. But both of these plot strands are only the necessary price in order for the film to exist. Its worth is in that existence, in the dailiness of the lives.

I confess a reaction even more subjective than reactions must always be. When I was a boy, I used to work every summer by choice—no, by devotion—on farms in central New York. In those days farmers seemed to me everyday heroes, self-reliant, taciturn, equipped for all sorts of emergencies, at ease with weather and nature, knowledgeable with horses. (There were no tractors in that region then.) Allowing for changes, *Tully* took me back. I could even smell the inside of the barn.

The film is too slowly paced by its debut director, Hilary Birmingham, and the story wheezes like a third-rate version of O'Neill's New England plays. But the people in this picture live and work and eat like people I once knew. I even recognized the young rooster Tully Junior, the older son, who cuts a wide swath with local girls. I knew that fellow and, at eleven or twelve, listened wide-eyed to his reports of his exploits.

Anson Mount catches the brashness and the bravado of the part perfectly, and Bob Burrus as his father is exactly like some men that I knew. I never knew a farm girl as taking as Julianne Nicholson, but her characterization of Ella, unashamedly plain beside Junior's chief sex interest, made me regret my loss more than ever. Nicholson endows the girl with pride and deep feeling.

Tully is the sort of independent film that contradicts today's generalizations about the trampling of American film by herds of mechanized mammoths. We can all wish that *Tully* were stronger in several ways, but we can also recognize

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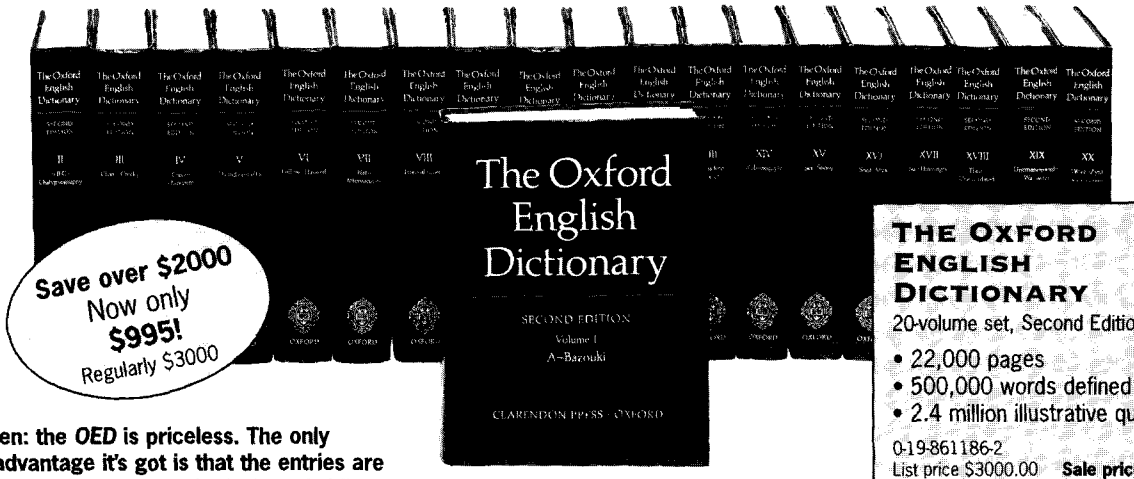

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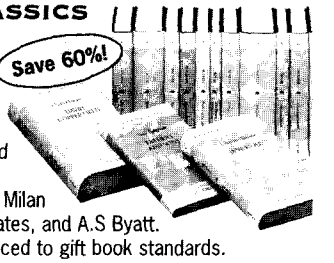

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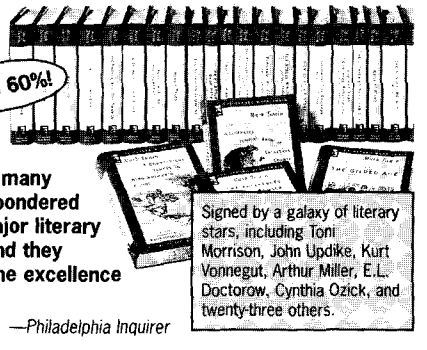
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Birmingham's empathy for the living of lives, and we can hope that she gets chances to grow.

Book note. Still a third stratum of American film, besides Hollywood and (as usually conceived) the independent, is the avant-garde. (Brisk definition: avant-garde films do not aim primarily for narrative or drama but for visual adventure.) An outstanding history of this field has long been P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film*, first published in 1974 with a second edition in 1979. Now Sitney presents the third edition (Oxford University Press, 462 pp., $65, $19.95 paper), which brings the chronicle up to the end of the twentieth century. This expanded edition sustains the book's high place as a tribute and a guide. ■

Solzhenitsyn and the Jews, revisited.

Alone Together

By RICHARD PIPES

RECENTLY ALEXANDER Solzhenitsyn published a long book called *Dvesti let vmeste*, or *Two Hundred Years Together*, the first of two volumes devoted to the history of Jews in Russia from the third partition of Poland in 1795, when Russia, until then effectively without Jews, suddenly acquired one million Jewish subjects. It covers the years between 1795 and 1916. The follow-up volume will bring the story up to the year 1995.

One cannot help but marvel at the intellectual energy of a novelist who in his seventies undertakes research on a vast and tangled historical theme with which he has only the most superficial familiarity. In his introduction, Solzhenitsyn says that during his work on the Russian Revolution he had frequently run into the problem of Russo-Jewish relations but found no history that illuminated the subject in a balanced matter. His book is an attempt to remedy this lacuna. He makes a conscious effort to show empathy for both sides, calling on Jews and Russians to display "patient mutual understanding and an acknowledgment of their share of sin"—the ultimate sin being the 1917 revolution that brought Russia untold miseries.

Someone familiar with Solzhenitsyn's treatment of Jews in his historical novels cannot escape the feeling that, at least in some measure, this undertaking is an effort to rid the author of the reputation for anti-Semitism. Although Solzhenitsyn has always indignantly rejected this accusation, it was not entirely unmerited. In *Lenin in Zurich*, he depicted the Russian Jew Alexander Parvus-Helphand as a slimy, sinister, almost satanic figure as he attempted to hire the exile Lenin to work for the Germans. In *The Red Wheel*, when dealing with the assassination of his hero Peter Stolypin by Dmitry Bogrov (whom he named "Mordka" or Mordechai, lest anyone miss his nationality), Solzhenitsyn attributed to the assassin, without any historical warrant, a desire to prevent Stolypin from reforming Russia, since what was good for Russia was bad for the Jews. In fact, Bogrov came from a thoroughly assimilated family—his grandfather was a convert and his father a member of the Kievan Nobles' Club—and he had no Jewish interests in mind.

Solzhenitsyn's new book (which is not yet available in English) helps to clarify the writer's attitude toward Jews. He draws a sharp distinction between religious Jews and assimilated Jews, notably those assimilated Jews who joined the revolutionary movement. For the former he has admiration that verges on mystical reverence. "The preservation of the Jewish people for more than two thousand years in diaspora," he writes, "arouses amazement and respect": "The role of the small but energetic Jewish nation in the vast and expansive history of the world is undeniable, powerful, persistent, and even salient. Russian history included. But it remains an historical mystery for all of us. For the Jews as well. This strange mission by no means brings them happiness either." He also respects Zionists and expresses esteem for Israel. But his attitude toward assimilated Jews is ambivalent, and he seems uncertain about whether or not they contributed to Russia's well-being. His difficulty is due to the fact that he is a nationalist; nationalism in general—and Russian nationalism in particular—is not readily compatible with tolerance toward Jews, partly for religious reasons, partly because they refuse to dissolve without a trace in the ethnic community in the midst of which they live.

This ambivalence is apparent in Solzhenitsyn's treatment of the Jewish contribution to the pre-revolutionary Russian economy. He describes in considerable detail the important functions that Jews performed in the country's economy, thanks to their industry and their ability to put capital to its most effective use. They were prominent in banking, and they launched Russia's sugar and timber industries. They financed much of the country's railroad construction. At one time they controlled the bulk of its grain trade. These activities helped Russia to attain a spectacular rate of economic growth at the end of the nineteenth century. Still, the czarist authorities tended to regard the Jews as engaged in "unproductive" work, and on more than one occasion they attempted to settle Jews forcibly on the land. Solzhenitsyn recounts these economic activities, but in a manner intended to convey how good Russia was to the Jews rather than how good the Jews were for Russia.

To his credit, he disposes of the canard, widespread in late czarist Russia, that the Jews exploited the peasants. He cites the historian I. Orshanskii to the effect that Jewish traders opened markets for peasants by transforming articles of consumption into commodities, in this manner enriching the peasantry. The historical evidence indeed indicates that Russian peasants fared better in the regions populated by Jews—that is, the so-called Pale of Settlement—than in other parts of the empire where legal residence was forbidden to Jews.

SOLZHENITSYN RESERVES HIS hostility for those assimilated Jews who, from the 1860s onward, in large numbers joined the revolutionary movement. He cites name after name, and he conveys the impression that Jews supplied the leadership as well as the rank and file of this movement, adding naïvely that his stress on Jewish radicals "does not mean, of course, that there were not many and important revolutionaries among the Russians."

The subject is very complicated. Although Jews, especially converts, did play a significant part in radical subversion, the ranks of the revolutionaries were certainly dominated by Russians. At one point Sol-

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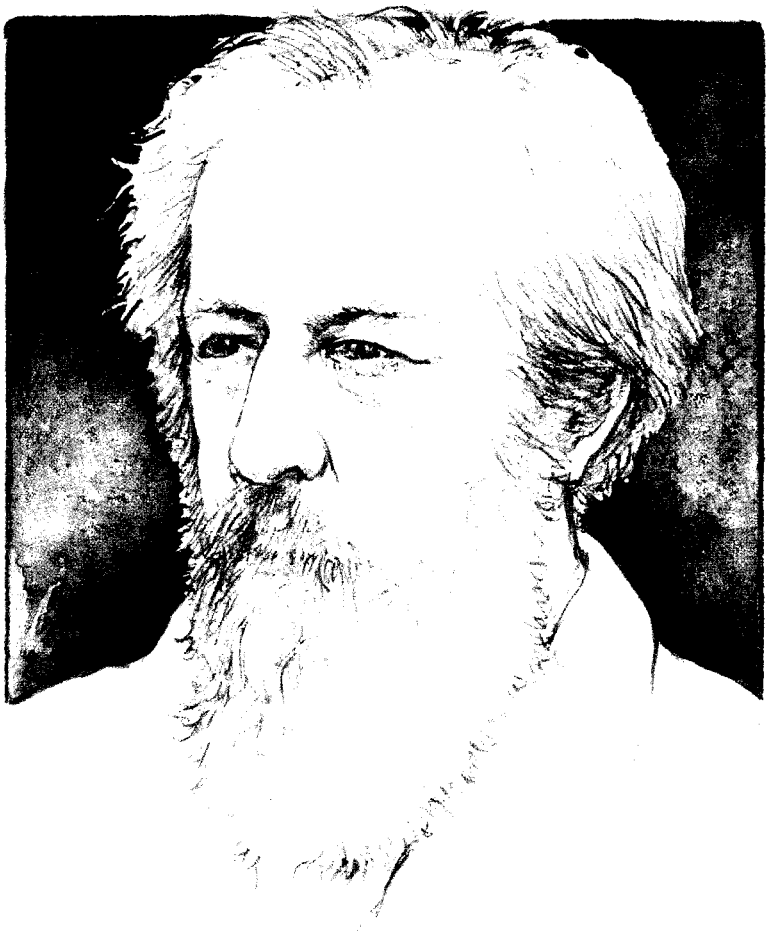
zhenitsyn asserts quite wrongly (citing a Jewish writer) that Jews imported Marxism to Russia. In reality, this was the work of Russians such as George Plekhanov, who organized in Switzerland Russia's first Marxist party, and Peter Struve, who popularized Marx's ideas inside the country. Statistics on this controversial subject are scarce, and most of the evidence is impressionistic and anecdotal.

Still, it cannot be doubted that the proportion of Jews in the ranks of Russian revolutionaries significantly exceeded the proportion of Jews in the population at large. This fact, previously played down by Jewish historians, was confirmed a few years ago by Erich Haberer in his study *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia*. But what sort of criterion is this by which to measure the role of an ethnic group in public life? If Jews were prominent in socialist ranks, they also stood out in capitalist circles: in the judgment of the German historian Werner Sombart, they actually invented capitalism. They were also over-represented among physicists, chemists, mathematicians, medical doctors, chess players, university students, and the many other occupations that called for intellectual distinction. Indeed, if the standard is to be the share in the population at large, then it must also be noted that Jews were disproportionately attracted also to fascism. "In Italy there were innumerable Fascist Jews," Zeev Sternhell observed in *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*. "Their percentage in the movement was much higher than in the population as a whole." Conversely, they were under-represented among Russia's murderers and arsonists.

So what are we to make of all this? Only that, as Solzhenitsyn likes to stress, Jews are a highly dynamic nation: as such, they are over-represented in most fields of endeavor in which they participate. Just to set the record straight, let it be noted that in 1917, when they got their chance to vote freely in national elections, the majority of Russian Jews cast ballots not for the Socialists or the Communists but for the Zionists: thus, in the All-Jewish Congress, they cast 60 percent of the vote for the Zionists. The Communist Party census of 1922 revealed that less than one thousand Jews had joined the party before 1917.

There is another aspect to this vexing issue. Virtually all the Jews who joined the revolutionary movement broke with their religion and community: they were apostates. Typical was the attitude of Trotsky when he was approached by the chief rabbi of Moscow during the Civil War with a plea to help fellow Jews victimized by the pogroms. "I am not a Jew," he angrily replied. "I am an Internationalist." The high percentage of Jews in the ranks of the revolutionaries only serves to demonstrate that Jews who abandon their religion and turn their backs on their people become uprooted and hence capable of the wildest excesses—which does not detract from Judaism, but redounds, on the contrary, to its credit.

To be fair, for all his emphasis on their participation in radical ranks, Solzhenitsyn absolves Jews of responsibility for the revolution: "No, in no way can it be said that Jews 'made' the revolution of 1905 or 1917 as it was not made by another nation taken as a whole." If there is a bias in this book, it is in favor of the czarist government, which Solzhenitsyn strives to acquit of its reputation for persistent hostility toward its Jewish minority, and its subjecting the Jews to no end of discrimination and persecution. Up to a point, he is right. The czarist government's treatment of its Jewish subjects was inconsistent. It vacillated between the desire to draw Jews out of their seclusion and have them assimilate and the contrary desire to isolate them. The former trend prevailed in the first half of the nineteenth century, the latter in the second half, when Jewish involvement in the revolutionary movement persuaded the government that the Jews' assimilation was dangerous. The result of these inconsistent policies was a legal nightmare: in essence, Russian Jews could do nothing that they were not specifically permitted to do, which necessitated the creation of a distinct branch of jurisprudence. Constant exceptions were made to discriminatory rules; and even when they were in force, such rules were overcome by bribing the police.



Alexander Solzhenitsyn by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

What Solzhenitsyn almost entirely misses is the poisonous atmosphere that was created by anti-Semitic propaganda emanating from the Orthodox church and nationalist circles. Government censorship—which cracked down on liberal and socialist publications whenever they called for political reform—gave free rein to incitement against Jews in the daily and periodical press. If there is a discussion in Solzhenitsyn's book of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a Russian forgery that for a century now has been fomenting murderous anti-Semitism worldwide, including in Nazi Germany, I missed it. True, similar hate propaganda flourished in contemporary France and Germany, but in those countries, where there was freedom of speech and freedom of the press, the government's blessing was not implied.

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Solzhenitsyn dismisses the notorious Union of Russian People—which propagated the slogan "beat the Yids, save Russia"—as an unimportant marginal group, but he ignores the fact that it had hundreds of branches across the country, and incited pogroms, and received government subsidies for such activities. Nor does he mention that Nicholas II thought well enough of the Union of Russian People to accept its insignia.

Still, Solzhenitsyn properly exonerates the czarist government from responsibility for the terrible pogroms of the 1880s and the early 1900s. Hearsay notwithstanding, no evidence has come to light that the government instigated violence against Jews, let alone organized it. In not doing so, it acted in its own interest, for it realized that riots against Jews could readily turn first against Christian landlords and then against its own officialdom. As he points out, the socialists/revolutionaries of the People's Will welcomed the pogroms for the same reason, seeing in them a manifestation of "class consciousness." He himself interprets the pogroms as spontaneous outbursts, which he blames, rather vaguely, on the "tragic quality" of Russians and Ukrainians, "in moments of anger, to succumb to blind passion... unable to distinguish the guilty from the innocent."

For all his insistence that the record of czarism in its treatment of Jews is much better than it has been customarily depicted, Solzhenitsyn shows understanding for the hardships inflicted on Russian Jews. The Pale of Settlement, introduced under Catherine the Great as a kind of Jewish reservation, "cast a somber shade" (in his words) on Jewish existence up to the very eve of revolution: it became increasingly unbearable as its population exploded. Describing attempts to force Jews to turn to agriculture, he acknowledges that farming is not a skill that can be learned overnight: "agriculture is high art, inculcated in generations, and it is futile to settle people on the land against their wishes or without their cooperation." He describes the restrictions imposed on Jews as "vexing, painful, even appalling." The coincidence between pogroms and the celebrations of Christian Easter fills him "with bitterness and anxiety." The Beilis trial of 1913, in which a Jew was accused of ritual murder (though subsequently acquitted), he characterizes as a "debasement of justice." "How not to understand their grief?" he wonders compassionately when Jews were singled out for deportation from the frontier regions during World War I. He notes that Jews who converted to Christianity enjoyed all the rights of Russians of equal status, but asks whether it was "acceptable, morally as well as practically, to give Jews access to life's bounties on condition that they change their religion." (In this connection he makes an astonishing error in asserting that Count Egor Kankrin, the finance minister of Nicholas I, was the converted son of a rabbi, and Count Karl Nesselrode, Nicholas's long-serving minister of foreign affairs, a convert from Judaism. In fact, the former was born in the family of a German mining engineer, and the latter's father was a Protestant count of the Holy Roman Empire.)

The source base of Solzhenitsyn's book is thin. He relies heavily on a few secondary works, such as the sixteen-volume *Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia*, or *Jewish Encyclopedia*, that was published on the eve of World War I, and Iurii Gessen's standard two-volume *Istoriia evreiskogo naroda v Rossii*, or *History of the Jewish People in Russia*, published in 1925 and 1927. Ignorance of foreign languages has placed beyond Solzhenitsyn's reach the rich literature on his subject in English, German, and French (not to mention Hebrew). These lacunae, combined with his forceful interventions at each stage of the narrative, make his history something more than a personal statement yet less than a work of scholarship.

Still, Solzhenitsyn's book is a notable achievement in its attempt to place the "problem" of Russian Jewry in political and social perspective, and one that does credit to its author's reputation. If Solzhenitsyn does not quite succeed in exonerating pre-revolutionary Russia of responsibility for subjecting its Jewish citizens to uncivilized discrimination—after all, it was the only Christian country that in the nineteenth century still subjected its Jewish citizens to medieval disabilities—and even if he does not fully understand the latter's predicament, at least he absolves himself of the taint of anti-Semitism. ■

Meet the Flintstones

By SIMON BLACKBURN

The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature by Steven Pinker

(Viking, 509 pp., $27.95)

I.

WHEN THE HOARY old question of nature versus nurture comes around, sides form quickly. And as Leavis once remarked, whenever this is so, we can suspect that the differences have little to do with thinking. Still, the question certainly obsesses thinkers, and it crops up in various terminologies and under various rubrics: human essence versus historical accident, intrinsic nature versus social construction, nativism versus empiricism. In the ancient world, the nativist Plato held that we come into the world equipped with knowledge obtained in a previous life, while the empiricist Aristotle denied it. In our own time, Chomsky has revived the nativist doctrine that our capacity for language is innate, and some ultras have even held that our whole conceptual repertoire is innate. We did not ever have to learn anything. We had only to let loose what we already have.

There is a standard move—call it the demon move—in such a debate. First we establish our own reasonable credentials. We, the good guys, are not taken in by the labels. We recognize, of course, that any human being is the result of both nature and nurture. There is the biological or genetic endowment and there is the environment in which the biological or genetic endowment gets expressed. We good guys understand that it is meaningless to ask whether iron rusts because of the nature of iron or because of the environment in which the iron is put. We

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know that the rusting requires both. It is the deluded others, the bad guys, who forget entirely about one or the other of these components.

So if you wish to demonize theorists on the nature side, present them as genetic determinists who hold that there is no more to growing up than following a formula written in the genes. These dangerous fools think that iron is programmed to rust wherever you put it, as if oxygen and moisture had nothing to do with it. And if you are demonizing theorists on the nurture side, then portray them as holding that human beings have no characteristics at all except those that are inscribed by environment and culture. These dangerous fools think that the chemical nature of iron has nothing to do with whether it rusts. (There is also a second-order, or meta-demonizing, move to make. Not only have the dangerous fools got themselves into an extreme position, they also have the gall to paint people like us as extreme. They are not only blind to their own extremism, they are also blind to our moderation. The things they call us! They must be doubly demonic.)

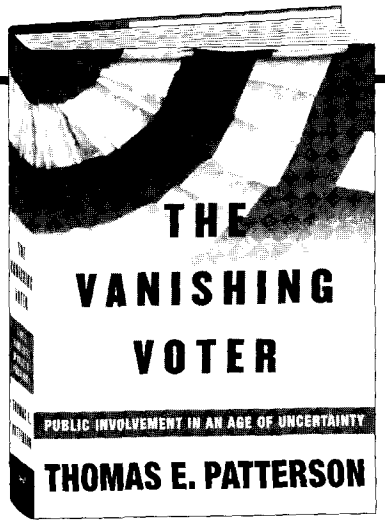
The irony is that, having satisfactorily trashed the other side, people tend not to stay in the reasonable middle that they claim to occupy. The fig leaf of moderation is very quickly discarded. Just as in football a defeat for one side is a victory for the other, and in politics a defeat for the left is a victory for the right, so here a defeat of the others is a victory for whichever extreme appealed in the first place. We want simplicity, and our binary thinking is not hospitable to compromise or to pluralism. George W. Bush can woo the people by saying that you are with us or you are against us. He cannot do so by saying that you are with us or against us or somewhere in between. It appears that only fitfully and with effort can we keep it in our heads that iron rusts owing to a number of factors. In our hearts, we are pulled one way or the other.

This is certainly so with the debate about human nature. The dichotomy between nature and nurture rapidly acquires political and emotional implications. To put it crudely, the right likes genes and the left likes culture, although there are cross-currents even in this scheme. (Chomsky is a left-wing nativist.) But the natural thought is that if, say, crime is scripted in the genes, then there is no reason on that score to work for the equality of wealth and the eradication of poverty, because you will get crime anyhow. If mad jealousy or rape is an evolved strategy for unsuccessful males, then there is no reason to promote an atmosphere of respect for women, because you will get mad jealousy or rape anyhow. Steven Pinker insists that politics needs first and foremost a view of human nature, since only unrealistic politics will be the consequence of unrealistic views.

Pinker presents himself as entirely reasonable, naturally; and for large parts of his book he succeeds in being so. He is certainly a skillful expositor and a persuasive writer. He is intelligent and humane. There is a lot to be learned from *The Blank Slate*. Pinker seems to know everything (the bibliography runs to nearly thirty pages of very small print). He certainly has opinions about everything, and the answers to all the questions. The panache and the promise are intoxicating. It is difficult to talk with perfect certainty of human nature, but where Shakespeare and Proust could only crawl, Pinker gallops. He is the noisy prophet of a new world in which a confluence of sciences finally delivers us the truth about ourselves.

Students of rhetoric will also admire his mastery of the demon move. As is clear from the book's title, it is the nurture side of the debate that is Pinker's demon. He hails from the citadel of nativism, the linguistics and philosophy departments at MIT. The enemy is empiricism, and the blank slate of the title is the "tabula rasa" or white paper to which John Locke famously compared the human mind. The doctrine of the blank slate is taken to deny that we have a nature at all. The blank slate is the universal human endowment, which waits passively to be written on by experience and environment. It has no nature; or, to put it another way, nothing in its nature determines the upshot when experience does its work. It is the clay waiting for the sculptor to form it, and the sculptor can make anything at all of it. It is this model of the mind, and its political and practical implications, that are Pinker's targets.

We might feel some disquiet about Pinker's polemic when we remember that Locke himself held no such view and intended no such view by his famous analogy. He is perfectly happy with the idea that the nature of the slate or the paper may determine what can be written on it. As a good Christian, Locke believed that an "all-wise Maker" grants us a very definite constitution, enabling us to know what we need to know and not much more. We can know what matters to us and know how to do what is good for us. But Locke also believes in our fallen nature, and he is constantly harping on



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"the narrow measure of our capacities" and the ways in which we are not fit for various kinds of understanding, whereas better-endowed creatures, such as angels, might be. Locke, in other words, thought that basic powers and limitations of our human nature determine the scope and the limits of our understanding. You cannot think that if you also deny that we have a human nature at all.

Locke wanted only to deny innate ideas and innate knowledge, not innate powers or tendencies, nor innate limitations, nor innate cognitive and emotional capacities. This may sound like a mere historical quibble, but it arouses a powerful doubt about Pinker's diagnosis of modernity. If Locke did not hold the doctrine of the blank slate, then Leibniz and Hume and Kant, not to mention the massed ranks of churchmen declaiming about human depravity and the Freudians declaiming about the nature of men and women, most certainly did not hold it either. And then its status as a central and unsalutary determinant of modern thought looks a little shaky.

YET PINKER INSISTS that the doctrine of the blank slate is one of a trio of views that have dominated modern life, wreaking havoc in education, politics, and culture generally. Skipping for a moment, the third member of Pinker's malign trinity is Cartesian dualism: the notorious separation of mind and body expressed most decisively for the modern era by Descartes. This doctrine, which has become known in our time as "the ghost in the machine," strictly separates the mind or soul from the body. By doing so, it takes the soul outside the sphere of mechanical or scientific explanation. It splits the world of the mind from the world of science. It is often supposed to protect our cherished free will. Pinker thinks that this bad idea has obstructed the emergence of a genuine science of the mind, which is still struggling to emerge from its oppression. Here he is on stronger ground, since Cartesian dualism has surely influenced many people and goes on doing so. It is the philosophy that makes the survival of the soul after bodily death intelligible. It is also a philosophy that makes downward causation from mind to body impossible to understand, enabling the cruder kind of theorist to deny that it happens.

The second member of Pinker's unholy trinity is in some ways the most interesting. It is Rousseau's doctrine of the noble savage, or the view that human beings are naturally unselfish and peaceful and happy, and that our greed and violence and misery are entirely the products of culture or civilization. Early in the book Pinker writes:

> Nobody can fail to recognize the influence of the doctrine of the Noble Savage in contemporary consciousness. We see it in the current respect for all things natural (natural foods, natural medicines, natural childbirth) and the distrust of the man-made, the unfashionability of authoritarian styles of childrearing and education, and the understanding of social problems as repairable defects in our institutions rather than as tragedies inherent to the human condition.

Here we may feel another stirring of discomfort. For the passage and its tone of certainty nicely illustrate the way the demon move works. On the face of it, the features of contemporary thought that Pinker here highlights admit of much more nuanced and sensible explanations than any simple doctrine of the noble savage. Perhaps we like natural foods because artificial foods taste so ghastly by comparison, as anyone returning to the United States from almost anywhere else will testify. Perhaps we like natural medicines because we mistrust the influence of the drug companies on what are presented as results in pharmacology. Perhaps we like natural childbirth (unless things go wrong) because we think that in this area, at least, evolution might have resulted in something fairly optimal, or perhaps we have a parent (like my own daughter) who strongly resents being forced to take unpleasant and dangerous drugs like pethidine by a profession bent on making things easy for itself. Perhaps we dislike authoritarian styles of childrearing not because we think children are naturally saintly, but because we have learned to doubt whether violence is the best way to eradicate violence. And perhaps it is our policy to think of social problems as repairable because sometimes there is just a chance that they are, and if there is, then hand-wringing over their tragic inevitability will not find the repair. Or perhaps we are just more careful about inferring tragic inevitability from science. To avoid such a mistake it is good to remember examples such as this. Our susceptibility to cholera is a result of our genome, but the repair lies outside, in the public-health provision of clean water.

In other words, right from the start there is a question mark over Pinker's historical method. It may be that an extreme view, the doctrine of the noble savage, has influenced some people at some times; but few parents retain the belief that their infants are angels for very long, and the ruthless European extermination of indigenous peoples everywhere scarcely testifies to a general belief in their superior nobility. A more detailed history, either of parenting or of colonialism, would uncover a whole tapestry of shifting and conflicting attitudes. So we ought to worry about the ease with which Pinker conjures his demons.

This is especially so given that the doctrine of the blank slate is inconsistent with the doctrine of the noble savage. The latter talks of innate tendencies to peace, happiness, and altruism, whereas the former denies innate tendencies at all. Can people really have held both? Pinker notices the problem, but he minimizes it on the grounds that if you think there is nothing there to begin with, then at least you think there is nothing harmful there, and that is halfway to accommodating the idea of innate purity and nobility. Maybe, but the association remains imperfect, and the more we test it, the harder it is to see modern life as really dominated by Pinker's diabolical trinity. Pinker does cite, very effectively, some hair-raising blank-slate claims, especially from the behaviorists J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, who claimed to be able to turn anyone into anything with sufficient conditioning. But then these behaviorist advertisings had nothing whatever to do with belief in the noble savage or in free will—with both of which they fit badly.

Still, it is not for its cultural history that people are buying Pinker's book in alarming numbers, but for the promise of a new synthesis, a science of the mind that finally tells us who we are, what is possible for us, how our politics should be organized, how people should be brought up, what to expect of ethics—in short, how to live. In the old days, philosophers, dramatists, historians, anthropologists, writers, and poets monopolized these subjects. Now behavioral economists, biologists, cognitive scientists, evolutionary theorists, and neurophysiologists occupy the territory. A brave new dawn is upon us.

II.

IF WE IMAGINE a scale from zero (genes have nothing to do with human nature) to ten (culture has nothing to do with human nature), I should guess that Pinker scores about nine. He holds, for example, that the way children turn out is almost wholly unaffected by how their parents bring them up. This is mostly certified by studies of identical twins reared apart, although here he does not refer to Cyril Burt, the

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British psychologist who wrecked the education system on the basis of such evidence, having made it all up.

Actually, there is a whole lot more to worry about with twins studies. Their results are expressed in terms of the heritability of properties, or the proportion of variance supposedly due to genetic factors. There is already a serious question mark here, since by the time of birth the twins' genes have been expressing themselves in an identical environment for nine months, and the extra delay before separation and its extent are confounding factors (many "separated" twins are brought up within the extended family). The results of this research have included such gems as the belief in the heritability of milk and soda intake (high) or of fruit juice and diet soda intake (not so high). What is not usually stressed, and is not stressed in Pinker's book, is that any measure of heritability is highly contextual. In a world of clones, the heritability of properties is zero; in a world of absolute sameness of environment, it goes to 100 percent. That is, if iron is put in a uniform environment, differences of rust are 100 percent due to differences of composition, but if identical samples of iron are put in a variety of environments, differences of rust are 100 percent due to environment. Heritability also has little or nothing to do with the malleability of the trait in question. In Swedish twins studies, heritability estimates for regular tobacco use were given as three times as great for men as for women, but for women they also ranged from zero to 60 percent in three different age cohorts, presumably because of changing cultural pressures on female smoking.

Pinker is not aware of the health warnings attached to this kind of research, or he chooses not to mention them. Anyhow, he thinks that violence in America is not to be approached in terms of media violence, childhood abuse, guns, discrimination, poverty, divorce, alcohol, drugs, or indeed anything except Hobbes's view of the inevitable nature of human aggression. He writes as if any explanation of human phenomena that invokes culture is loosely and mischievously positing a "superorganism" or a free-floating "cloud" lying above and beyond the individual.

Pinker believes that anybody who scores around five on my scale is in the grip of his demon myths, and really scores zero. So he routinely sets tests for those on the other side and parades their inability to meet them, without revisiting the question of whether his side can meet them. Thus he makes much of the fact that if exposure to the media were implicated in violence, we might expect Canada's homicide rate to be about the same as that of the United States, while in fact it runs at about one-quarter. But Pinker is silent about the fact that if nothing but a shared Hobbesian human nature were the explanation, then we would also expect an identical homicide rate. (To be fair, in a different part of the book Pinker does mention an explanation of the difference in the different history of expansion of the two nations—a geographical and cultural explanation that leaves you wondering about the efficacy of his otherwise cherished biological explanation.) There is also a rather startling absence of countervailing evidence, such as the recent surgeon general's report about media violence, or the well-known meta-study of studies of violence by Haejung Paik and George Comstock, which found in 1994 that media violence affects young people's chance of being violent about as much as smoking affects people's chance of getting lung cancer.

In sum, Pinker is an unblushing proponent of "evolutionary psychology," the descendant of sociobiology that has swept campuses and bookstores for the last decade or so. The building blocks of this addition to science are well known. At its simplest, we find some allegedly common human trait, and we explain why we have it by imagining how a propensity to it might have been beneficial in the Flintstone world, or in the Pleistocene conditions in which apes evolved into humans. Suppose, for instance, a finding that women typically prefer richer and taller men. We take such a fact, or factoid, and then hypothesize that this preference is an adaptation in the biologist's sense: it contributed to increased reproductive success. That is, there is some mechanism (at its simplest, a gene or two) that increases the probability of that preference, and women who have it reproduce more successfully than women who do not. Their mates' riches enable their children to survive in greater numbers, and their mates' height makes them better hunters (ignore the fact that they are presumably worse gatherers). Women without the gene gradually lose out. Only those with it produced lineages descending as far as the present.

Such stories go nicely with other views about the mind. One is the doctrine of the "modular mind," often known as the Swiss-army-knife picture of the mind. The mind is not one huge general-purpose information processor, but an agglomeration of modules specifically

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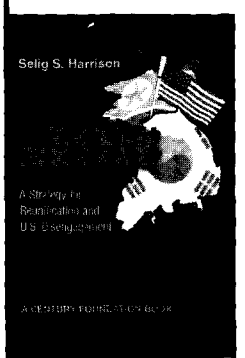

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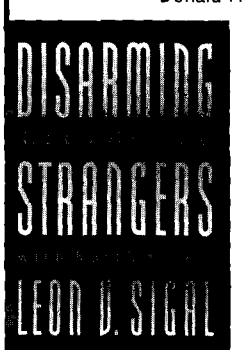

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dedicated to particular tasks. It is not so much one tool as a commonwealth of little tools. So Pinker likes to talk of a faculty such as sympathy or of a propensity to aggression as switches and knobs that can be turned on or off, or set at one level or another.

Pinker rightly notices that if we go in for these stories, we must be extremely careful to distinguish our overt psychologies—which he calls proximate mechanisms—from their underlying evolutionary function. I can illustrate this little trick with the juicy case of sexual desire. The evolutionary rationale is reproduction. But the overt objects of desire need have nothing whatever to do with that rationale: just think of the huge variety of non-reproductive sexual pleasures to which people are so irresistibly drawn, and the precautions that they take in order to avoid reproduction. People want sex without wanting to reproduce, and for that matter they sometimes want to reproduce without wanting sex. We should also notice that the example puts a question mark in front of the idea of a single human nature, since the overt objects of desire are so extraordinarily various. Indeed, evolutionary stories about psychology should embrace this, since evolution can happen only where variation exists and selection works on it, which fits badly with the generally monolithic ambition of finding one "real" human nature within.

PINKER CAN BE admirably clear about these things, but he falters when it comes to their applications. Consider one of the poster children of evolutionary psychology, the robust finding by Martin Daly and Margo Wilson that stepchildren are more at risk from parental abuse than natural children. Pinker writes:

> Daly and Wilson had originally examined the abuse statistics to test a prediction from evolutionary psychology. Parental love is selected over evolutionary time because it compels parents to protect and nurture their children, who are likely to carry the genes giving rise to parental love. In any species in which someone else's offspring are likely to enter the family circle, selection will favor a tendency to prefer one's own, because in the cold reckoning of natural selection an investment in the unrelated children would go to waste. A parent's patience will tend to run out with stepchildren more quickly than with biological children, and in extreme cases this can lead to abuse.

Well, maybe. Actually, it is not clear that evolutionary psychology predicts good fathers at all: back in the Pleistocene, gadabout cads presumably fathered more offspring than stay-at-home dads. I seem to recall that Wilma Flintstone was a jealous and possessive wife. But in any event, we might agree that if Abel and Bertha have a child, and then Abel disappears and Chuck hooks up with Bertha, it seems plausible that Chuck should care less for the child than for one that he himself had fathered with Bertha. This is what the statistics bear out. But now we may reflect that if Abel and Bertha bought a dog or a sofa, and then Abel disappeared and Chuck hooked up with Bertha, it seems equally plausible that Chuck should care less for the step-dog or the step-sofa than if he had bought them together with Bertha. My bet would be that an incomer's abuse of step-dogs and step-sofas is worse than abuse of dogs and sofas couples buy together. Conversely, when the genetic link is absent but the togetherness is present, as when couples decide together to adopt children, parental love seems to function perfectly well: at least Pinker does not suggest otherwise. Normal people take pleasure in the doings of children in general. The mothers at a play group do not typically snarl at one another's children for being genetic competitors to their own.

The point is not that parental love is anything other than an adaptation: such a notion is absurd. The point is that its strength and its direction can be quite independent of any belief in a genetic link with the object of love. It may be that, as Pinker says, in the cold reckoning of natural selection Chuck's investment in his adopted offspring goes to waste. How fortunate, then, that Chuck's own reckoning is not that one. Indeed, if Chuck is anything like a good parent, he will not be thinking in terms of investment and return at all. Supposing that Chuck's reckoning has to be that of natural selection is no better than supposing that the strength and the direction of sexual desire are proportionate to the expectation of reproductive results. From Augustine onward, generations of churchmen have wished that this were so, but it isn't.

ONCE WE BECOME properly alert to the huge distance between our overt psychologies and the evolutionary rationales that can be offered to explain them, the messianic promise of evolutionary psychology in general, and of *The Blank Slate* in particular, begins to look awfully thin. Pinker says—and I am sure that he is right—that some faculties, or modules, incline us to greed, lust, malice, envy, anger, and aggression; and others incline us to sympathy, foresight, self-respect, and desire for the good opinion of others; and then we can exchange information with others, and personal and social change can come about when we do. But suddenly the notion of a faculty or module starts to evaporate. The Swiss army knife may have a corkscrew that works however blunt the knife is. But if there is one thing that is clear about our psychologies, it is that the functioning of one module can affect the delivery of another module. Our tendency to anger is suppressed by our prudence. Even at the sensory level, how we smell something is affected by what we are told it is. In the right social climate, our greed is checked by our desire for the esteem of our fellows. We imitate and respond and adapt ourselves to the expectations of others. And this leaves scope, to put it mildly, for culture and ethics. It means we will no longer respond in the same way. We will no longer be made angry by what might have made us angry in a different milieu, or desire what we would have desired, or envy what we would have envied.

In his less doctrinaire moods, Pinker does not deny this. He quotes with approval Peter Singer's image of the expanding circle, whereby our concerns can come to embrace not only ourselves but also our family, tribe, class, nation, race, humanity, and eventually animals or even plants. The circle of our concerns can widen, and indeed has done so: "once the sympathy knob is in place, having evolved to enjoy the benefits of cooperation and exchange, it can be cranked up by new kinds of information that other folks are similar to oneself." This sounds about right to me, apart from the mixed metaphor. And apart from the lingering sense that the "benefits of cooperation and exchange" taint the purity of our concern for others, even at our best—which, to flog the horse once more, is like supposing that even sodomites and foot fetishists are secretly trying to reproduce.

III.

IT SOUNDS, THEN, as though there remains plenty of room for education and culture, conceived of as natural devices for turning up the good knobs and turning down the bad ones. We would look to the inherited experience of history, or to the experience of parents and educators, to find out how to replace competition with cooperation, aggression with peaceability. We would try to think

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seriously about why the homicide rate in Canada is one-quarter that in the United States, and we would welcome narratives from historians or anthropologists telling us of similar variations. We would applaud the way in which peaceful Scandinavians have descended from bloodthirsty Vikings (Pinker's example), and we would hope to reproduce whatever factors enabled this to happen. But biological theory cannot provide the answers, or the descendants would resemble the ancestors, since evolution has had too little time to work.

We might try saying that the Scandinavians and their ancestors share a psychology. They both seek to maximize their utility. *Homo economicus* is each of us, a simple fellow, always and only asking: what's in it for me? The environment is relevant insofar as it means that sometimes peace might be the answer and sometimes violence. Our human natures are not so much a blank slate as a slate with a single scratch on it. Pinker does not really believe this, and after all it would mean that blank-slate theorists were very nearly right. But neither is he prepared to avoid it by conceding the vast variety of psychologies that history parades before us, and by celebrating the cultural transformations that give us some control over them. He insists on a one-way street: culture is the product of individual psychologies. You should not explain individual psychologies by reference to culture. We need to see "culture as a product of human desires rather than as a shaper of them."

This is a very surprising ideology for a professional linguist, and so far as I can make out Pinker does nothing to defend it. Faced with the question, "Do we explain language in terms of individual language speakers, or individual language speakers by reference to language?", the only possible answer seems to be that the traffic flows two ways. We learn at our mothers' knees, and when our generation grows up we transmit what we learned, modified by us individually and collectively, onward to the next generation. The English language is a cultural resource, and there is nothing unscientific about invoking facts about it to explain facts about individuals. The trick is to remember that facts about culture are not facts about some cloudy super-organism, some transcendental spirit of the age hovering around in hyperspace. They are summaries of facts about ourselves and our interactions. What they summarize is the very, very important part of our environment that concerns our interactions with other people. Those interactions shape the way we speak, but also the way we hope and fear and take pride and feel shame. They summarize what we imitate and emulate and eventually what we grow to be.

So the Viking has ambitions, fears, conceptions of esteem, pride, and honor, all of which he gets from his culture and which determine his bloodthirstiness. All of these are lacking in his pacific descendants, while other values have been put in their place. In other words, their psychologies are indeed different, and the interesting thing for politicians, educators, and parents is the question of how those differences came about and how the progress that they represent can be cemented and duplicated. That is what culture is. Explaining the Scandinavian progress by reference to culture is just as proper as explaining my accent by reference to the prevailing sound of English where I grew up. The Viking is bloodthirsty because he lives in a bloodthirsty culture. And the culture is bloodthirsty because of the people in it. You can have both, and there are no demons anywhere.

Once we get past the demonizing and the dogma, and take proper notice of the space between overt psychology and evolutionary rationale for it, and lose any phobia of cultural phenomena, what is left? There are plenty of sensible and plausible observations about human beings in Pinker's book. But it is not clear that any of them is particularly new: Hobbes and Adam Smith give us more than anybody else, and their insights have stood the test of time, unlike some more recent work. Consider again the example of media violence. Here it seems that psychologists cannot speak with one voice about its effects. But worse than that, much worse, they cannot even speak with one voice about what psychological studies find about its effects. That is, the meta-studies that Pinker cites flatly disagree with the meta-studies that I mentioned earlier. If this is the state of play, we do well to plead the privilege of skepticism. We also do well not to jettison other cultural resources too quickly. The depressing thing about *The Blank Slate* is that behind the rhetoric and the salesmanship, I suspect that Pinker knows this as well as anyone else. ■

The Prisoner of Myth

By JAROSLAW ANDERS

Regions of the Great Heresy
Bruno Schulz: A Biographical Portrait
by Jerzy Ficowski
translated and edited by Theodosia Robertson

(W.W. Norton, 256 pp., $25.95)

I.

ONE OF THE most frequently recounted biographies in the history of Polish literature is known primarily for its ending. On November 19, 1942, a Gestapo officer shot and killed a fifty-year-old man in the Drohobycz ghetto. The victim, one of more than two hundred Jews who were murdered on "Black Thursday," was Bruno Schulz, a local high school teacher and artist, and the author of two slim volumes of dream-like prose that a few years later were hailed as one of the most original achievements of Polish literature in the twentieth century. It is hard to guess what this timid, cautious person was doing in the streets during a German killing spree, one of numerous such "wild actions" that preceded the "final solution." According to one version of the event, Schulz had decided to attempt to escape from Drohobycz and was going to the *Judenrat* to purchase his ration of bread. Others say that, ill and dejected, he was roaming the streets as if looking for death. He appears to have fallen victim to a feud between two local Nazi satraps. His body remained in the street until sunset, when it was secretly buried by some friends; his grave has never been found.

A few months earlier, in Nazi-occupied

JAROSLAW ANDERS's study of modern Polish literature will be published by Yale University Press.

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Warsaw, an eighteen-year-old Polish poet named Jerzy Ficowski read one of Schulz's books, published shortly before the outbreak of the war. He remembers a sense of an immediate, almost mystical connection with the writer, and a conviction that Schulz must be "the kind of genius who sometimes creates great religious systems, or a magician and master of black arts, whose predecessors were burned at medieval stakes." Ficowski did not know that Schulz, resettled into the ghetto in Galicia and furnished with a certificate that protected him as a "necessary Jew," had been surviving for some time as an artist-slave in the service of a brutal SS-man named Felix Landau, who took a fancy to his drawings, and made him paint his portraits and decorate his villa, and secured for him artistic assignments for the German institutions in the town. (Some of Schulz's frescos survived the war, and a few years ago they were snatched from Drohobycz by Yad Vashem and surreptitiously transported to Israel, to the outrage of Poles and Ukrainians.)

Having learned about Schulz's death, Ficowski decided to preserve as much as was still possible of his hero's legacy. He wished to salvage and to reconstruct Schulz from scraps of surviving documents and letters, and from the memories of those who knew him. He became the self-appointed custodian of the writer's work and life. Ficowski, who lives in Warsaw in an apartment filled with Schulz memorabilia, is also known as a poet, a translator from Yiddish, a specialist in Gypsy literature, and an author of books for children. His cycle of poems *Odczytanie popiołów*, or *A Reading of Ashes*, is one of the most powerful literary testimonies to the Holocaust written in Polish by a non-Jew. And yet, despite his own considerable literary achievement, Ficowski is defined chiefly by his Schulzian obsession. He declares himself "a reader of a single book, one for which no rival has emerged," a "personal and disquieting bible" that speaks about "the secret essence of things which transcend their own limitations"—in other words, the Book of Schulz.

REGIONS OF THE GREAT HERESY, the result of Ficowski's lifelong and almost religious devotion to the strange writer from Drohobycz, was published in Poland in 1967, only a few years after Schulz's own prose was resurrected by Polish publishers after decades of neglect. It was soon followed by *The Book of Letters*, a collection of Schulz's correspondence edited by Ficowski, and two other books devoted to more recently discovered letters, writings, and testimonies. This English edition is an expanded version of its Polish predecessor, and it includes material from Ficowski's other publications on Schulz.

It is hard to overestimate the service that Ficowski has performed with his uncommon dedication. He has managed to preserve—not only for Polish literature, but also for world literature—a very great writer, and also substantial fragments of his world, the Galician-Jewish-Polish-Ukrainian mélange that was completely wiped out by World War II and its brutal aftermath. It is quite possible that without Ficowski there would be no Schulz, just as without Max Brod there would be no Kafka. And yet the Schulz that we have is distinctly Ficowski's Schulz—his own version of a writer and an individual who, from the strictly factual standpoint, remains a puzzle, a subject of conjecture, hypothesis, and invention. Ficowski is not only the archaeologist of Schulz's life, he is also the creator of the Schulzian myth.

In this respect, too, the analogy with Brod's impact upon the reception of Kafka comes to mind. For the myth of Schulz and the myth of Kafka display striking similarities. They are both varieties of the modernist myth of the artist as a dark hero, a neurotic, a misfit rejected and maligned by the philistine society in which he miserably lives, humbled by circumstances but spiritually unvanquished, bearing cryptic revelations beyond the comprehension of conventional reason. Ficowski declares that he is not interested in a reasoned analysis of Schulz's prose, and quotes his idol, who wrote in a letter to his friend and fellow writer Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz in 1935: "I think that the rationalization of the vision of things rooted in the work of art is like the demasking of actors.... In the work of art the umbilical cord is not yet cut that joins it to the whole of the problem. The blood of the mystery is still circulating; the ends of the vessels escape into the surrounding night and return full of a dark fluid."

Ficowski seems to subscribe to this romantic view without reservations. "The essence of the work," he remarks, "remains unattainable, always happily eluding the critics' scalpels and microscopes." And since any "close reading" of the text is tantamount to sacrilege, what remains is the close reading of the artist's life, the study of the "correlations between the man and the writer, the life and the work, the actual events and the artistic creation." Ficowski's Schulz is an emblematic modern artistic sufferer, not unlike Brod's Kafka: a sickly, misunderstood, lonely, inhibited man who faces reality with the naïveté and the helplessness—and the privileged intuitions—of a child who seeks refuge in the magic gardens of his imagination. "A profound inferiority complex accompanied him all his life," Ficowski writes, "for which his artistic creativity later became a partial remedy, but never a complete liberation.... The shyness or embarrassment which rarely left him precluded closeness with others

COURTESY PICADOR

Bruno Schulz, *Encounter: A Young Jew and Two Women in an Alley*, 1920

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and intensified the growing sense of isolation that tormented him from childhood: his increasingly hermetic solitude."

Schulz, according to Ficowski, was "consumed by fears and complexes," and surrounded by hostile, insensitive people from whom he was forced to conceal "the literary and artistic fruit of his spiritual entanglements and complications." One of these "complications" was his masochistic sexuality, which found expression in his erotic drawings. About this subject Ficowski is more reticent than others, but he suggests that his hero suffered from pathological submissiveness and passivity that prevented him from escaping his provincial environment, his dreary job, and eventually his death in Nazi-occupied Drohobycz. This is now the Schulz of legend—but the truth is more complicated than the legend, as always. Indeed, even the facts gathered by Ficowski allow us to sketch a different, though no less intriguing, portrait of the writer and the artist.

BRUNO SCHULZ WAS born in 1892 into an assimilated Jewish family. His father Jacob was a merchant, while his mother Henrietta came from an affluent industrialist family. Schulz's native town, Drohobycz, at that time in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was not at all a somnolent shtetl, as it is often described, but a vibrant provincial town with its own theater and its own "entertainment" district, later portrayed so memorably by Schulz in his story "The Street of Crocodiles." Drohobycz owed its relative prosperity to oil fields discovered in nearby Boryslaw at the foothills of the Carpathian mountains, and its outer suburbs were dotted with the luxurious villas of the local plutocracy. The proximity of Truskawiec, a fashionable spa frequented by vacationers from Kraków, Lvov, and Warsaw, contributed to Drohobycz's peculiar mixture of the provincial and the cosmopolitan.

Drohobycz was sometimes called "a town and a half," because it was supposedly "half-Polish, half-Jewish, and half-Ukrainian." In fact, Jews constituted almost half of the population, with the other half divided more or less evenly between Poles and Ukrainians. After the war, Drohobycz became a stock of legends among its Polish and Jewish diaspora, an epitome of Galician charm and multi-ethnic geniality. (According to one account, the funeral of a beloved Drohobycz rabbi was attended by crowds of Polish and Ukrainian mourners.) But the Polish-Jewish writer Henryk Grynberg, in his fine new book *Drohobycz, Drohobycz* (Penguin), paints a much darker picture of the relations between the communities who shared this place on the eve of the catastrophe. According to testimonies gathered by Grynberg, Polish and Ukrainian nationalisms simmered throughout the interwar years and sometimes erupted into open hostility, with Poles and Ukrainians pitted against each other and against the always punishable Jews. Still, Drohobycz under Polish rule did not experience pogroms or any major incidents of nationalist violence. It certainly helped when Jews, such as the Schulz family, did not manifest their religious difference. Bruno, who later left the Jewish religious community, was named after the Christian patron of his birthday, and while accompanying his mostly Catholic students to church he would genuflect in front of the crucifix. All this, of course, seems like an idyll in comparison with what was soon to follow.

The young Schulz excelled in school and quickly demonstrated his artistic talents. His teachers encouraged him to pursue his interests in the visual arts, which seemed to be his main vocation, and his school proudly sponsored the printing of a postcard featuring one of his works. Later the explicitly sexual content of many of his drawings scandalized the more conservative elements of the Drohobycz

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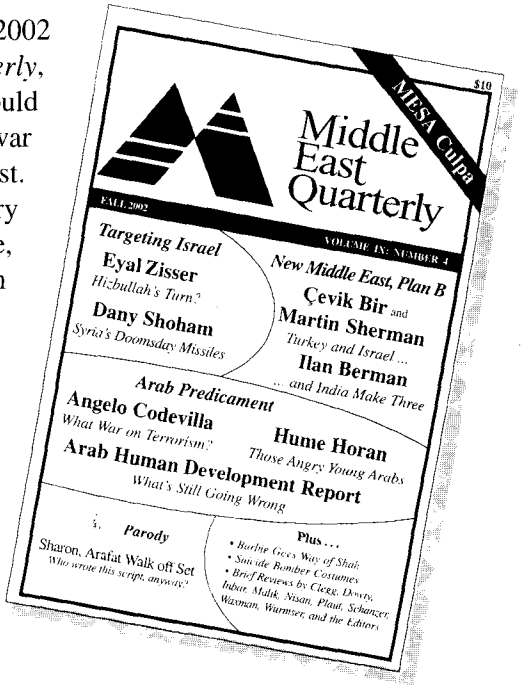

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community, but there is no evidence that Schulz treated his art as especially personal or shameful, or that he tried to hide it from the world. He frequently exhibited his drawings in Warsaw, Lvov, Kraków, and Truskawiec, and presented them as gifts to friends and relatives, and sold them in self-published folios. He treated them, in other words, with a measure of professional detachment. He often drew his own face on the dwarfish, half-human creatures crawling at the feet of his beautiful, pouting women, but he also liked to depict his friends and his acquaintances in similar states of abjection. (He created a scandal when someone recognized his own wife among the naked prostitutes in one of the more lascivious drawings.) But those familiar with the Expressionist style of the time, which clearly influenced Schulz, must have understood those excesses as a calculated erotic impishness. In those days, perversion was an artistic fashion. Vienna was not too far away, and even Drohobycz had to maintain its standards of decadence.

LIKE HIS FATHER, Schulz suffered from poor health, which interfered with his studies and his creativity. He was afflicted by phobias and anxieties—and yet his life was hardly as sorrowful as is often assumed. In fact, most of his days passed in relative comfort. The Schulz family was sufficiently well off to allow the artistically inclined son to pursue his interests without worrying about gainful employment. After graduating from high school Schulz studied architecture in Lvov. A bout of illness and the outbreak of World War I forced him to return to Drohobycz. A year later his father died, at the age of sixty-nine. Soon afterward, excused from military service on account of his health, Schulz traveled to Vienna, where he attempted to resume his architectural studies, although his stay in the capital of the crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire lasted only six months. Back in Drohobycz, he joined a group of local young intellectuals, artists, and musicians called Kalleia, or "beautiful things"; practiced his graphic craft; and read voraciously from the library and the bookstore of the father of one of his closest friends.

Though he is often described as a loner, Schulz was in fact a gregarious fellow. He was always surrounded by brilliant, devoted, and often influential friends, especially sophisticated women of artistic ambitions. Some of them remained his lifelong correspondents and promoters, and one of them, a Polish-Jewish poet named Debora Vogel, encouraged him to think seriously about writing. Later, when Schulz became known in avant-garde circles in Warsaw, his close friends included not only Witkiewicz, but also Witold Gombrowicz and the grande dame of Polish letters, Zofia Nalkowska, whose salon (and bedroom) he visited during his stays in Warsaw. It was Nalkowska's enthusiasm that opened doors at the best literary periodicals and the avant-garde publishing house Rój (The Hive), which brought out both of Schulz's books as well as Gombrowicz's groundbreaking novel *Ferdydurke*, with a design by Schulz on its cover.

Schulz's correspondence indicates that he was by no means an innocent about the workings of literary life, and though he was lacking in natural resourcefulness, he could nonetheless "manage" his career with a degree of professionalism and cunning. We see him systematically trying to "break into" literary Warsaw and to meet the right people. In one letter he openly solicits a favorable review for an acquaintance who (he admits) may be useful to him. He could be quite effective in pestering his friends for help in getting grants and writing assignments, and he met with a surprising amount of kindness. Even the usually pitiless Gombrowicz, who occasionally taunted Schulz for what he considered artistic affectations, displayed an uncharacteristic protectiveness toward his much older colleague. Schulz's famous letters—lyrical and literary, sometimes including credo-like explanations of his ideas about art—can be surprisingly businesslike. They also betray a self-centered personality preoccupied almost exclusively with his own spiritual ventures, his writing, and the practical problems of his life. He rarely takes an interest in other people's dilemmas. He speaks about his desire for solitude and silence, but he longs for an ideal camaraderie of kindred souls, "partners in discovery," "one or two people who would not constrain me," "sensitive souls one does not have to close oneself from, or translate oneself into a foreign language." Like most writers, in sum, he seeks not friends but admirers. He was forever in need of reassurance.

There is also an unmistakable note of self-pity running through Schulz's letters, especially after he was finally forced to get a job as an arts and crafts teacher in order to support himself and his widowed sister. He saw it as an undeserved punishment and an unbearable burden. "So much mechanical, soulless work for someone who could do other things—that is after all a great injustice," he wrote to a fellow schoolteacher. "My nervous system has a fastidiousness and delicacy which has not matured to the demands of a life denied the sanction of art," he remarked melodramatically on another occasion. "I am afraid this school year will kill me." The torment of teaching was also a handy explanation for his prolonged periods of despondency and his increasing problems with summoning his creative powers. Ficowski declares his full sympathy with his hero's suffering: "A mythologue-artist in the role of an overworked secondary school teacher was the contradiction and violation inflicted upon Schulz's own identity."

AND YET THIS "violation" was also a guarantee of the security that Schulz needed as much as he needed the "sanction of art." It is hard to imagine a person more unsuited to a bohemian way of life and more averse to risk. "In order to create," he confided in a friend, "I must have a particularly kindly and encouraging climate around me—good faith in myself, quiet, safety": lacking independent means, in other words, he needed a cozy sinecure. He obtained the job on the strength of his artistic achievement rather than his education or his experience, and he really expected an "idyll among professions" that would be appropriate for "people possessed of some mission, some lofty but unprofitable task." It turned out to be just a job, but the money was adequate, and tenure—which Schulz received after a few years of employment—guaranteed an economic sanctuary in a time of general uncertainty and widespread poverty.

It seems almost certain that his job, so maligned in many of his letters, was for Schulz a perverse source of relative satisfaction. His students remember him as a fascinating if often distracted teacher who knew how to encourage the more gifted among them while dazzling others with improvised fairy tales. Ficowski observes that "for an eccentric, Schulz enjoyed a considerable degree of respect," and his principals seemed to take considerable pride in his literary and artistic achievements. His publications, his exhibitions, and his awards were cited in the school registers. Schulz was recognized and even celebrated by the more sophisticated among his colleagues and his neighbors.

The legend of his slavish attachment to Drohobycz—a kind of self-imprisonment in the Galician backwater—also has little support from the facts. There can be no doubt that Schulz needed Drohobycz as the backdrop for his fantasies. His imagination required the excitement of the familiar so as to perform its feats of defamiliarization, and to transform it into

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the phantasmagoric landscapes of his stories. He often spoke about his hometown with affection, but he could also be cruel and disdainful about it, calling it a "death from monotony, growing boredom, terrible vomiting from the sterility of life." Anyway, he spent considerable amounts of time outside Drohobycz. He vacationed in nearby Truskawiec, which is the setting of some of his stories, but also in the more trendy and artistic Zakopane. He traveled to Lvov and Kraków, and after his literary debut he was a frequent visitor to Warsaw. Since his youthful sojourn in Vienna he was never tempted to return there, and for obvious reasons he carefully avoided Berlin; but he spent several weeks in Paris, on a failed attempt to launch his international career. He made the mistake of trying to take Paris in August, when the city is empty, but he brought back memories of grand museums and Parisian women, "those of proper society and cocottes, their free manner, the tempo of life." He even took a three-day cruise on the Baltic Sea and spent a day in Stockholm. For a provincial Eastern European of limited means and with a proclivity to peace and predictability, Schulz had a rather interesting life, and was in this respect more fortunate than many of the modernist writers and artists of his time—until the outbreak of the war, of course, when the true horror began for Schulz and millions of others.

II.

EVEN THOUGH THE myth of the "subterranean" Schulz, underappreciated and unloved, should be treated with caution, there is no doubt that the author of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* was a profoundly unhappy man. What is more, his deepest personal crisis coincided with the beginning of his literary career and the praise with which his work was greeted by most prominent literary voices of his day. Ficowski suggests that Schulz's despondency was caused by his inability to deal with his new public status and by his frustration at not having enough time to proceed with his literary projects. It is possible, however, that the writer—in his mid-forties and still on the threshold of a literary career—was displaying the first symptoms of artistic exhaustion. Perhaps one should look for the source of Schulz's anguish not in the circumstances of his life, but in the particular nature of his artistic sensibility. He may have become a victim of his own imagination, which trapped him in an invented world that was beginning to lose its magic.

Among his contemporaries Schulz is most often compared with Kafka. In truth, the two writers are almost polar opposites; and Ficowski shrewdly insists upon the dissimilarity:

> Schulz was a builder of a reality-asylum that was a marvelous "intensification of the taste of the world"; Kafka was an inhabitant and propagator of a world of terror, an ascetic hermit awaiting a miracle of justice that never came. Schulz was a metaphysician garbed in all the wealth of color; Kafka was a mystic in a hair shirt of worldly denials. Schulz was a creator and ruler of compensatory Myth; Kafka was the Sisyphean seeker of the Absolute.

One may object that there is a fair amount of terror in Schulz's world as well, but it is certainly true that Kafka strips the world naked, while Schulz drapes it in layers of fantasy. Kafka's heroes, though helpless and confused, are not in doubt about the difference between the self and the world, and their struggle for justice is a struggle to maintain this difference. Schulz's narrator, by contrast, strives to obliterate that barrier, and to create a reality that would be a seamless blending of the ego and the world. The difference of purpose between the two writers is obvious even in their language: there is Kafka's reticence and concreteness, his striving for semantic precision, which is one of the self's defenses against abstraction; and there is Schulz's effusiveness, mistiness, impressionistic excess, which renders an object or an event indistinguishable from the mental state that it evokes.

The unfortunate pairing of the two writers is partially due to the fact that the first Polish translation of *The Trial* bears Schulz's name, although most probably it was done by his fiancée, Józefina Szelińska. In the foreword to the translation, Schulz asserts that in Kafka's prose "for the first time the magic of poetry has created a species of parallel reality, a fictional body upon which mystical experience can be demonstrated." But Schulz is talking about himself, not about Kafka. When Gregor Samsa metamorphoses into a terrible insect, his transformation does not carry us into a parallel reality in which such occurrences are commonplace; instead it throws into relief the familiar world of daily concerns, hopes, and disappointments in which real Samsas, as well as most of us, actually live. Kafka is sensitive to everything that is irrational and illusory in life, but he confronts this irrationality in a cool, highly analytical mode, so as to

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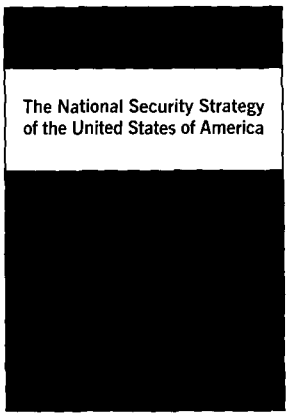

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demonstrate, not unlike Gombrowicz, how absurdity imperceptibly invades and subverts the most ordinary situations. For Schulz, on the other hand, the irrational and the fantastic are means of escape from the self, and from the struggles in which it is constantly embroiled. That is why Schulz cannot understand why Jozef K. is "clinging to his human reason instead of surrendering unconditionally" and following the two strangers to whatever fate they may have prepared for him.

Schulz's closest literary kin is probably Rilke, whom he read avidly. Like Rilke, he longed for "a very quiet, self-isolated world ... narcissism, solitude, seclusion inside a glass globe," and he believed that poetry draws its energy from the subconscious, "the tangled, deaf mass unformulated in us," which can "rise to the surface wonderfully distilled." The metaphors of the two writers often display surprising similarities. When Malte Laurids Brigge, Rilke's flaneur, walks down an empty street, he notices that "its emptiness had gotten bored and pulled my steps out from under my feet and clattered around in them, all over the street, as if they were wooden clogs." A similar transformation of emptiness occurs when the young protagonist of Schulz's story "August" observes a sleeping woman:

> And, as if taking advantage of her sleep, the silence talked, the yellow, bright, evil silence delivered its monologue, argued, and loudly spoke its vulgar, maniacal soliloquy. Maria's time—the time imprisoned in her soul—had left her and—terribly real—filled the room, vociferous and hellish in the bright silence of the morning, rising from the noisy mill of the clock like a cloud of bad flour, powdery flour, the stupid flour of madmen.

The typical Schulzian metaphor—often no more than a simile or analogy—endows objects, shapes, natural phenomena, and even abstract notions such as time and space with their own secret vitality. The writer leads us into a world in which burrs are "enormous witches, shedding their voluminous skirts in broad daylight," and apricots shelter "the core of long afternoons," and chandeliers blacken and wilt "like old thistles," and interiors "reflect their dark turbulent past," and mirrors cast "secret glances," friezes "panic," and wallpapers whisper and dream, while unmade, crumpled beds stand "like deep boats waiting to sail into the dank and confusing labyrinths of some dark starless Venice."

This is the deeply personal, lyrical, and animistic universe of Joseph, the awe-struck child-narrator of Schulz's stories, who is obviously named after the biblical diviner of dreams. Two other main characters, always portrayed through Joseph's eyes, are the father, a magician conducting strange experiments "in the unexplored regions of existence," and a maid, "slim-legged Adela," who brings erotic tension into Joseph's world, and whose ostentatious sexuality repeatedly spoils the father's magic. Occasionally we encounter also Joseph's mother, an affectionate but uncomprehending woman, uneasy and embarrassed by the zone of secrecy surrounding her husband. The father, Jacob (this was the name of Schulz's real father), is certainly the most puzzling protagonist of the Schulzian universe. He fascinates his son as someone who is in touch with the "roots of existence," a person capable of conjuring "unknown forms of life." But he is also distant, secretive, a bit menacing, "completely submerged in an inaccessible sphere." Sometimes it is suggested that he is "already lost, sold and surrendered to the other sphere," perhaps dead and revisiting his son's dreamscapes under fantastic guises—as a stuffed condor, a giant cockroach, a cooked crab. In the story "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass," he is simultaneously a bedridden, dying old man and a robust businessman enthusiastically pursuing his clandestine ventures. His chief quality seems to consist in inhabiting several worlds simultaneously, being present and absent, glorious and miserable, existing in a condition of constant transition that brings a thrill of excitement but also a terrible foreboding into his son's world.

Moving within the orbit of the father's dark star, young Joseph conducts his own explorations of reality's hidden side. In a garden overgrown with weeds he encounters a sylvan deity, who turns out to be a defecating drifter. He spies on a retarded girl, who in her trance appears to him "like a pagan idol." He pursues an aloof, beautiful girl named Bianca who lives in one of the opulent villas on the outskirts of the town, and he rides through a winter landscape in a cart drawn by a horse, which dies at the end of their trip and turns into a toy. During those peregrinations, familiar places—streets surrounding the city square, school corridors, even his own home—turn into endless labyrinths, while time splits into parallel strands, slows down, or becomes dense and incongruous like time in a dream.

ALL THESE TRANSFORMATIONS create a kind of glowing impressionistic tapestry that sometimes strikes the reader as uncommonly beautiful, disquieting, and original. But how did this world come to be? What is its motivation and its purpose? Most critics point to what appears to be Schulz's commentary on his art scattered throughout his writings, and expressed most fully in his essay "The Mythologizing of Reality," which was published in 1936. "The essence of Reality," writes Schulz, "is Meaning or Sense. What lacks Sense is, for us, not reality. Every fragment of reality lives by virtue of partaking in a universal Sense." There was a time, he continues, when every word contained that universal Sense, was a "great universal whole." Later, words lost this holistic quality, but are striving to regain it by reaching out in many different directions "like the cut-up snake in the legend." This striving of the word towards wholeness is, for Schulz, the very definition of poetry. "Poetry happens when short-circuits of sense occur between words, a sudden regeneration of the primeval myth." Human search for knowledge and

Ask Them

Ask them all where it is hid;
ask the old man and the kid,
fortune tellers in their stripy tents,
circus artists, governments,
cyclists round the velodrômes,
Rosicrucians and garden gnomes.
Enquire politely of city women in their fashion heels;
ask the sturgeons, lampreys and conger eels.
Visit Lourdes, Delphi, London Zoo;
lobby wolverine and kangaroo.
Humbly petition the Arapaho
(if it were known, surely they would know).
Look in each house, each council flat,
pray to God, consult the cat.
Ask them, ask them every one,
examine the poles, go to the sun.
You will not find a single clue;
it is no longer there for you.

John Stammers

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meaning, in fact every mental operation, is according to Schulz a burrowing among half-forgotten ancient narratives, "stories" that still linger in our subconsciousness. The poet's task is to reach into this deposit and to restore "conductivity" to words. "Language is man's metaphysical organ," says Schulz, because reality is the reflection of the word, not the other way around.

Notions such as "Sense," "Meaning," and "Myth," as well as a powerfully post-lapsarian feeling about his own time, appear regularly in Schulz's writing, although it is extremely difficult to define them precisely. (In places Schulz sounds uncannily like his contemporary Walter Benjamin.) Sometimes it looks as if the writer is speaking of nothing less than the search for a Gnostic "ur-Text," God's original Logos that created the world and, according to some beliefs, still resonates within the world. In a letter to the Polish poet Julian Tuwim, Schulz writes: "You have taught me that each state of the soul pursued sufficiently far into its depth leads through the straits and canals of the world—into mythology." In the same letter he also speaks about childhood as "The Age of Genius" (later a title of one of his stories), the time of pre-rational unity of the self and the world, when "all things breathed the radiance of divine colors," and one was able to feel the closeness of the Sense in a mystical, non-verbal way.

In the story "Spring," in which lovelorn Joseph re-invents history for the benefit of his beloved Bianca, Schulz addresses his reader, charging him directly to search for "the limitless possibilities of being" by descending into the uncharted regions of the subconscious, into the "labyrinths of depth" where "a great many old tales and ancient sagas have been collected, when too many whispers have been gathered underground, inarticulate pulp and dark nameless things that existed before words." In the story "The Book," Joseph is convinced that some time ago, in his early childhood, the mysterious pre-lapsarian scripture was in fact in his possession: "The Book lay still and the wind opened it softly like a huge cabbage rose; the petals, one by one, eyelid under eyelid, all blind, velvety, and dreamy, slowly disclosed a blue pupil, a colored peacock's heart, or a chattering nest of hummingbirds." In comparison with "the Book," even the Bible appears to him a mere "clumsy falsification." In the end, Schulz's protagonist discovers that the mystical volume was only a pile of old illustrated magazines, full of strange stories and intriguing, earthly pictures.

III.

Like most of those who write about Schulz, Ficowski tends to accept the writer's mystical self-interpretation. "His creation," he writes in *Regions of the Great Heresy*, "was hovering over an impenetrable secret." But I doubt that Schulz really was an aspiring adept in search of the Mysteries. It is true that he seems to postulate a unity of matter and spirit, a life-force permeating even inanimate objects; but his visions develop as a series of unconnected impressionistic images that never cohere into a larger pattern suggestive of a deeper metaphysical order. His baroque metaphors, his brilliant and innovative linguistic clusters certainly "renew" the world, but they do not discover anything about its nature, origin, or destiny. It is more likely that the search for a "primeval myth" is for Schulz merely an alibi for a free play of imagination. His real goal is not the philosophical or religious probing of life's depths, but the experience of life in an intensely sensual and radiantly aesthetic way.

Indeed, Schulz himself seems to treat his own alibi with a measure of distrust. The magical kingdom of his prose, with its decorative richness, seems always on the verge of collapse or self-parody. Like the "cinnamon shops" in one of his stories, the world impressed in the mind of the protagonist resembles an old curiosity shop, in which cheap trinkets glitter for a time like treasure before they return to their shoddy quotidian form. This strange coexistence of trashiness and magic was often interpreted as a clash between two antagonistic forces: the power of the imagination that lifts the hero into the realm of the spirit, and the downward pull of the degraded, materialistic reality of the new industrial age that intruded upon the quiet town of Drohobycz, represented respectively by the father, the guardian of the vanishing world of old, and licentious, provocative Adela, who constantly distracts him with her legs.

Ficowski accepts this dichotomy and suggests that Schulz tried to escape the encroaching materialism and the vulgar physicality by constructing an imaginary, hypothetical Arcadia of childhood. In fact, the opposition in Schulz's prose appears much less obvious: the shabby and the sublime (to borrow Adam Zagajewski's terms) are almost indistinguishable. When, in "The Street of Crocodiles," Schulz describes the district of illicit pleasures and suspicious transactions, the "parasitical quarter" vibrates with the same magic and endless transformative possibilities as the more innocent visions of young Joseph. The fundamental deceptiveness of this world, the "sham comedy," the "tawdry charm" of its colorful putrefaction seem the very conditions that make a Schulzian conjuring possible. They also communicate the reverse side of his creations: their palpable sadness, the sense of frustration and futility that color the writer's private world. When Schulz describes the Street of Crocodiles, he may be writing about the workings of his own imagination:

> Let us say it bluntly: the misfortune of that area is that nothing ever succeeds there, nothing can ever reach a definite conclusion.... It is in fact no more than a fermentation of desires, prematurely aroused and therefore impotent and empty. It is an atmosphere of excessive facility, every whim flies high, a passing excitement swells into an empty parasitic growth; a light gray vegetation of fluffy weeds, of colorless poppies sprouts forth, made from a weightless fabric of nightmares and hashish.... Nowhere as much as there do we feel threatened by possibilities, shaken by the nearness of fulfillment, pale and faint with the delightful rigidity of realization. And that is as far as it goes.
>
> Having exceeded a certain point of tension, the tide stops and begins to ebb, the atmosphere becomes unclear and

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troubled, possibilities fade and decline into a void, the crazy gray poppies of excitement scatter into ashes.

"And that is as far as it goes": it is a fitting motto, almost an epitaph, for the Schulzian fantasy. At a closer look his seemingly boundless world appears confined to the point of claustrophobia. Every movement leads to a dead end or brings us back to the point of departure. The narrator of the story "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass" visits what appears to be the place of his father's afterlife only to discover a world in which everything has already happened and the present seems to be no more than anticipated memory. The future does not exist in this world, and therefore there is no expectation, no chance of enrichment, no discovery, no possibility of escape, only "passing excitement" and "parasitic growth."

THIS CURIOUS SPLIT within Schulz's vision is probably the most important characteristic of his writing. He wishes to believe in the omnipotence of heroic, sovereign imagination, and treats creativity as a form of religious revelation; but he suspects that what we think, dream, and remember—our entire "internal" life—may be made of trash, and that our supposed freedom of imagination is just a solipsistic prison.

The proximity, or even the sameness, of the shabby and the sublime is the subject of Schulz's story-essay "Treatise on Tailor's Dummies or the Second Book of Genesis." In a lecture delivered to Adela and two seamstress girls, the father states that "creation is the privilege of all spirits," and man should claim the role of the Demiurge's partner, or even competitor. He should attempt to breath his own spirit into the world, because "there is no dead matter" and "lifelessness is only a disguise behind which hide unknown forms of life." The search for the Sense, the resurrection of the forgotten "Myth," is nothing less than the second Genesis, in which man assumes the role of a co-creator, or rather a co-fabulator, of the universe. At a certain point the father's call for a new demiurgy of man assumes a chillingly nihilistic tone: "Homicide is not a sin. It is sometimes a necessary violence on resistant and ossified forms of existence which have ceased to be amusing. In the interests of an important and fascinating experiment, it can even become meritorious. Here is the starting point of a new apologia for sadism."

After this surprising declaration, the father admits that the original "recipes" used by the real Demiurge may be beyond man's reach. "But this is unnecessary," he continues, "because even if the classical methods of creation should prove inaccessible for evermore, there still remain illegal methods, an infinity of heretical and criminal methods." In his competition with God, man should "give priority to trash," should yield to his natural passion for shabby, imperfect materials, "for colored tissue, for papier-mâché, for distemper, for oakum and sawdust." Man's creativity, according to the father, belongs to the "lower sphere," which he calls *generatio aequivoca*. His efforts would produce short-lived, illusory forms, "colorful and exuberant mildew," "a fantastic growth, like a beautiful rash." In another story, "Second Fall," the father compares beauty to a disease, "the result of a mysterious infection, a dark forerunner of decomposition, which rises from the depth of perfection and is saluted by perfection with signs of the deepest bliss."

Schulz's universe seems to be constructed according to the father's directive. Every intense experience suggests simultaneously a mystical revelation and a sham. In the story "Cinnamon Shops," Joseph accompanies his parents to a theater, where he observes a huge, painted stage curtain that appears to him "like the sky of another firmament." When a gust of air moves the curtain, it sends a tremor across the canvas that breaks his illusion, but at the same time it causes "the vibration of reality which, in metaphysical moments, we experience as the glimmer of revelation." Has the view of the crudely painted curtain led the boy to a mystical experience, or has it produced merely a "passing excitement"? Is the illustrated magazine in "The Book" a portal to the secret universe, or does it evoke in the young narrator empty "fermentation of desires"? It is probably Schulz's indecision in those matters that is the source of his verbal inventiveness, his unstoppable rush of metaphors that are always trying to insinuate more than words can express.

Yet the same ambiguity is also responsible for something sad and unfulfilled that lurks behind this fever of creativity. Schulz's imaginary kingdom enchants, but it also stifles. The reader is attracted to this domain and wants to explore it with somehow voyeuristic curiosity, but also feels it wise to plot a route of retreat. Perhaps this was the true source of the growing sense of disappointment and isolation visible in Schulz's letters after the publication of his works. We know that he found it increasingly difficult to find satisfaction in the creations of his mind, to achieve a "revaluation of life through poetry."

Ficowski's claims to the contrary notwithstanding, it is likely that Schulz abandoned his novel *Messiah*, which is probably the most frequently discussed non-existent book in the history of literature. But more generally, I think, he was unable to break out of the prison of his imagination. He remarked in a letter to one of his friends: "It seems to me that the world, life, is important for me solely as material for artistic creation. The moment I cannot utilize life creatively—it becomes either terrible and dangerous, or morally vapid for me." To say that life unredeemed by art becomes "morally vapid" is to confess that one is living in a hell of aestheticism.

Schulz was clearly aware that this categorical imperative to transform everything into art is a human deficiency. He considered himself incapable of love, and there is very little compassion in his writing. Only occasionally, in the stories about the retarded middle-aged man named Dodo and the crippled teenage boy Eddie, are we shown other human beings in a way that suggests their own personal dramas. Schulz hoped that his marriage to Józefina Szelińska might cure him of his pathological detachment. In one of his letters he confided to a friend that "my fiancée constitutes my participation in life; through her I am a person, not just a lemur and kobold," and he confesses to being lost in "inhuman realms, barren underworlds of fantasy." When his engagement broke off, he only half-jokingly considered the life of debauchery as the next best thing to his isolation. His late letters testify to a struggle with the crushing limits of his own mind, and also to the possibility of a liberation from his own mind: "The peculiarity and exceptionality of my inner process closed me off hermetically, rendered [me] insensitive, averse to invasion of the world. Now I open myself as if for the second time to the world and all would be well were it not for that fear and inner hesitation, as before a risky venture, leading God knows where." In a letter written in 1937, he reported that "what shut me off from the world's onslaughts recedes gently into the background and I, like an insect released from its cocoon, exposed to the tempest of an alien light and the winds of heaven, commit myself to the elements, in a way for the first time."

We shall probably never know what caused this need to break out of the "cocoon" of his fables and his myths. Perhaps it was the ominous political climate.

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Even Schulz could not remain impervious to it, though there is surprisingly little evidence of it in his letters and his writings. He alludes to the nearby *Anschluss* in Austria only once, as a "shattering historical event," and occasionally he voices his fear of losing his job, presumably owing to the rise of anti-Semitism in Poland. Yet nowhere do we find any indication that he thought about historical things deeply, or that he tried to evaluate them from a moral standpoint. It sometimes seems that he had no opinions at all, only metaphors, visions, fantasies.

When, as a consequence of the secret protocol of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Drohobycz was occupied by the Soviets, he took up a job as a decorator during official party functions. Schulzologists still quarrel about whether he did or did not paint portraits of Stalin. He timidly complained about the aesthetic concessions he was forced to make, and in one letter he regretted his "lack of elasticity and a refusal to compromise." Then came the Nazis, the ghetto, and his horrifying servile "relationship" with Hauptscharführer Felix Landau, one of the murderers of Drohobycz's Jews. This was another sort of abjection. To be sure, Schulz, like so many others, was fighting for survival, and the history of the Holocaust holds many equally strange and expedient and fateful choices. But if they were choices, acts of will, then one would hope to find traces of his thinking about his predicament in some of his writings, or at least in fragments of remembered conversations.

Witnesses told Ficowski that in this last period Schulz spoke about writing a chronicle of the martyrdom of the Jews. He was alleged even to have made notes for such a work, but nothing of those notes remains, and the silence surrounding his final months is excruciating. One of the last images of Schulz recorded by Ficowski shows him lying on his back on a scaffolding, like Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, painting the ceiling in the Gestapo offices in Drohobycz. What was he thinking about? Was the chrysalis finally broken? Was this the helpless insect naked in the storm that was about to crush him and his world? Or was he thinking only about the empty wall to be covered with faces, shapes, visions, the "exuberant mildew" that seemed to hold the promise of "limitless possibilities of being"? We shall never know, and it is hard to tell which of the alternatives is more terrible to contemplate. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

Indeed, Gorbachev would have succeeded Andropov had Andrei Gromyko not played the "old guard" trump card to give a sick and incompetent Konstantin Chernenko his brief shot at power.

Reagan deserves credit for significant success in this area but not as Kaplan describes it. His advisers were moved to paroxysms of apoplexy when Reagan raised the "zero option" with Gorbachev, but he stuck to his commitment. It is for this statesmanship and the disarmament agreements that followed that Reagan should get credit, not for setting a fatuous precedent for taking on Saddam.

RAY GEIGLE
Cambria, California

ROBERT D. KAPLAN REPLIES:

Arno Arrak makes essentially the same point I did in the article, though in a less straightforward fashion. As he says, Reagan's deployment of Pershings caused the Soviets to look for other ways of dealing with NATO, which led to Gorbachev's decision not to put down uprisings in Central Europe. Thus, Reagan's missile deployment was a pivotal factor in a chain of events that ended the cold war. As for both Arrak and Ray Geigle, if Politburo successions were such a foregone conclusion, how come many Western analysts were surprised when Andropov succeeded Leonid Brezhnev? For a KGB chief to succeed immediately to general secretary of the party was unusual. Quite a number of factors helped Gorbachev's ascension, Reagan's aggressive and dynamic foreign policy in Europe among them.

College terms

TO THE EDITORS:

A lower recidivism rate for inmates who choose to attend prison college, versus those in the same facility who do not attend, makes the case for the "compelling benefits" of such programs ("Prison Break," October 21). But it is predictable that the people who would choose to better themselves would be less likely to commit additional crimes than those who do not choose, or do not have the academic skills, to take advantage of these programs. A useful study would compare facilities that offer prison education programs with similar facilities that do not.

MARSHALL ST. CLAIR
West Hartford, Connecticut ■

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CAMBRIDGE DIARIST

Class Act

8 MILE, THE NEW FILM STARring (and not so loosely based on the life of) rapper Eminem, just enjoyed the second most profitable opening weekend ever for an R-rated film. And, if the theater on Boston Common where I saw the movie is any indication, with looser enforcement of the age minimum it would have easily passed *Hannibal* for the top all-time position. Scores of young moviegoers huddled in the lobby, eyeing adult buyers who might be persuaded to purchase tickets in bulk—a scene eerily reminiscent of a liquor store parking lot on prom night. Whatever their parents' views, it seems clear that large numbers of kids find Eminem nothing short of intoxicating.

EMINEM'S MOTION-PICTURE DEBUT as his sanitized doppelgänger "Rabbit" does not mark the first time Universal Pictures has produced a movie about a white rapper. When the company released *Cool as Ice*, starring Vanilla Ice, in 1991, however, the film did not exactly threaten box-office records. Principal among that film's lengthy list of problems was that, just before its release, Vanilla Ice (who claimed to have grown up on the mean streets of Miami) was unmasked as Robert Van Winkle (who actually spent his formative years in an affluent Dallas suburb). Predictably, efforts to explain the deception—"I was trying to keep people from messing with my family. A lot of people get murdered, you know"—rang hollow to even his most devoted fans. Vanilla Ice lied, of course, not because he feared for his family's safety but because he sensed that the world was unprepared for a white rapper from a comfortable background.

THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED ALL THAT much since then. Though the world of hip-hop has become a bit more open since the early '90s, questions of identity continue to pervade the genre. And, even as *8 Mile* congratulates itself for transcending the racial reductionism that demands that a rapper be black, the film all too happily promotes the economic reductionism that insists that a rapper, especially a white one, grow up poor. In one of the film's opening scenes, a friend bolsters Rabbit's confidence by encouraging him, "Once they hear you, it won't matter what color you are." This message seems to have been accepted at face value by critics. A review in *The Village Voice* argued that "*8 Mile*'s flimsy script is made interesting by a good director and a charismatic star"; the film is made "important," however, by virtue of "its belief that race doesn't matter."

BUT THE IDEA THAT A WHITE RAPPER can achieve sufficient authenticity that race ceases to be an issue resolves the matter a bit too easily. By the artistic standards of the medium, there's little question that Eminem's talent rivals that of his peers; he demonstrates clever word play, a preternatural sense of time, and a capacity for vulnerability (alongside his infamous capacity for hate) that is all too often absent in hip-hop. But talent is merely the first hurdle that Eminem must clear. Because, even as race recedes as the crucial element of street credibility for hip-hop artists, its proxy, class, becomes increasingly important. Whatever their youthful circumstances—the artist currently known as P. Diddy, for instance, was raised as Sean Jean Combs in Westchester and attended Catholic school—black rappers need not worry that their lives will too closely resemble those of their revenue-generating fan base in white, suburban enclaves. As they begin to accumulate wealth, then, there is no shame in indulging in the extravagant bling-bling lifestyle that has come to define successful rap artists. Eminem, however, clearly feels he must maintain his working-class pedigree to keep an economic buffer between himself and his wealthier fans. Otherwise, he risks looking too privileged and, well, too white. Eminem's videos, unlike those of his hyper-materialistic hip-hop brethren, do not feature him sipping Cristal, driving Bentleys, or cruising on yachts. Similarly, on the cover of his album *The Marshall Mathers LP*, Eminem poses in front of his shabby childhood home, not the gated community where he currently resides. (Notably, although *8 Mile* takes its name from the avenue that divides the urban from the suburban in Eminem's native Detroit, the film takes place exclusively downtown, never showing the suburbs that actually bankroll hip-hop.)

EMINEM PLAYS THE CLASS CARD AT every opportunity. And here he certainly possesses an authentic pedigree. Though his given name, Marshall Mathers III, sounds dangerously well-heeled, the details of Eminem's upbringing are more than sufficiently hardscrabble. He was born to a single teenage mother on welfare. His father left when he was baby. He dropped out of high school after failing ninth grade three times, and he fathered a child out of wedlock. Perversely, these biographical realities are "advantages" of which Eminem's producers are well aware. Jimmy Iovine, who heads Eminem's Interscope label and served as a co-producer of *8 Mile*, is quick to characterize the film's central theme as being "about class, not race, and hip-hop is one of the reasons."

THE PENULTIMATE SCENE IN *8 MILE* depicts Rabbit verbally battling a black rapper named Papa Doc. Rabbit begins his freestyle attack by changing the rules of engagement, from authenticity-through-race to authenticity-through-class. Yes, Rabbit raps, he's white, he lives in a trailer with his mama, and his girl has been unfaithful. But, turning his attentions to his rival, Rabbit reveals that Papa Doc attended an elite private school, his parents remain happily married, and, most ignominiously, his given name is Clarence. Rabbit, in other words, holds himself up as the authentic hip-hopper by ripping a black rapper for being middle-class. Papa Doc is rendered literally speechless. How can he rebut Rabbit's assault after being exposed as nothing more than a dark-skinned Robert Van Winkle? (One of the more surreal moments in my moviegoing life occurred when the largely black crowd in the theater joined the largely black crowd on screen in cheering lustily as Rabbit vanquished Papa Doc.)

FAR FROM UNTETHERING HIP-HOP from race, Eminem's class bait-and-switch simply replaces the fact of blackness—i.e., skin color—with an idea of blackness that equates being black with being poor, angry, and uneducated. Eminem is perpetuating precisely the idea that animated Norman Mailer's 1957 essay "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster." Mailer argued that whites could be "black" if they adopted certain traits that he viewed as inextricably tied up with blackness, such as living in the "enormous present" and "relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body." Eminem would likely object to Mailer's racist posturing, particularly in light of his steadfast refusal to utter the word "nigger" in any context. "That word," he says, "is not even in my vocabulary." Unfortunately, judging from the evidence, neither is the term "black middle class."

JUSTIN DRIVER

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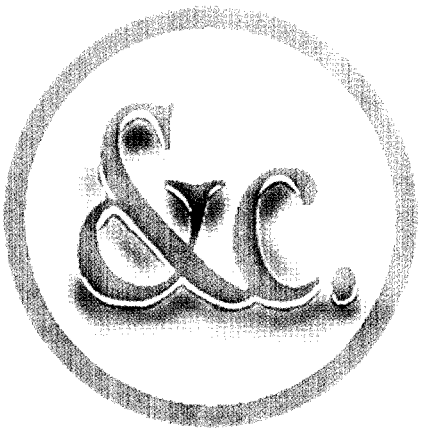

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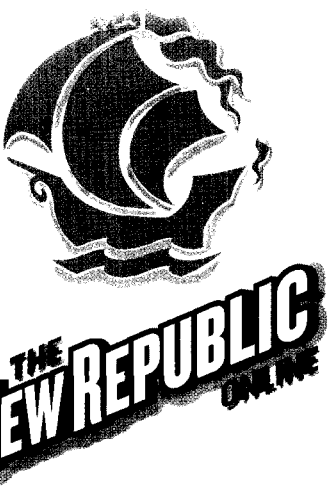

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A Label We Don't Need

Henry I. Miller is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

If you were designing a label to inform consumers that, for safety reasons, certain foods need to be cooked or handled in a certain way, what would it say? How about "Made in Brussels"?

No way, ridiculous and irrelevant, you say. Right on all counts. But that is tantamount to what the European Commission and parliament have decided to require for foods derived from organisms that have been genetically improved with the most precise gene-splicing techniques. This is public policy that puts politics and groundless fears ahead of science and common sense, and into conflict with more rational U.S. regulations.

Product labeling that conveys essential information is important, but compulsory labeling of gene-spliced foods is a bad idea for several reasons. First, it implies risks for which there is no evidence. Second, it flies in the face of worldwide scientific consensus about the appropriate basis of regulation—that it should focus on palpable risks, not the use of certain techniques. Third, it will push the costs of product development into the stratosphere. And fourth, the requirement constitutes a punitive tax on a superior technology.

The European Union (EU) is implementing labeling requirements for biotechnology that are more appropriate to potentially dangerous prescription drugs or explosives than to long-shelf-life tomatoes and disease-resistant potatoes.

Those who advocate mandatory labeling for genetically altered foods invoke consumers' "right to know." Just inform them what is in their breakfast cereal and let them make their own choices, goes the argument. But experience argues otherwise: The United Kingdom's mandatory labeling law has had the opposite effect. It sparked a stampede by food producers, retailers, and restaurant chains to rid their products of all gene-spliced ingredients so they wouldn't have to introduce new "warning" labels and risk losing sales.

A broad scientific consensus holds that modern techniques of genetic modification are an improvement on the kinds of genetic modification that has long been used to enhance plants, microorganisms, and animals for food. Because of the precision and predictability of the technology, the products of the newest techniques are even more predictable than—and at least as safe as—the genetically improved foods that have long enriched our diets, such as sweet corn and high yield grains.

Following long-standing precedents in food regulation, the FDA requires labeling if any new food raises questions of safety, nutrition, or proper usage. There is, however, no requirement for disclosure of the use of particular techniques to make food.

The European-mandated need to segregate gene-spliced foods will raise production costs and pose a particular disadvantage to products in this competitive market with low profit margins. To maintain the accuracy of labels, gene-spliced fruits, vegetables, and grains will have to be segregated through all phases of production—planting, harvesting, processing and distribution—adding costs and compromising economies of scale.

If enough people want to avoid gene-spliced food, niche markets will arise without a government mandate, as they have for organic and kosher products. For the present, it appears that the EU's regulations on labeling deserve a label of their own: unscientific and anti-consumer.

— Henry I. Miller

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